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# Manipulating Images of Women's Power in Elizabethan England: Elizabeth I, Spenser, and Shakespeare

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MANIPULATING IMAGES OF WOMEN'S POWER IN  
ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND: ELIZABETH I, SPENSER, AND  
SHAKESPEARE

A Thesis

by

AMANDA KAYE MARTIN

Submitted to the Office of Humanities and Fine Arts of University  
of the Incarnate Word in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 1999

Major Subject: English

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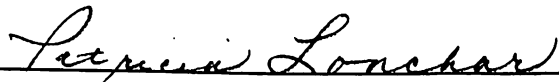
Submitted to University of the Incarnate Word  
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## Table of Contents

1. Acknowledgements	Pg. i
2. Introduction--Viewing Elizabethan England through Literature	Pg.1
3. Chapter One--Elizabeth's Self Depiction	Pg. 23
4. Chapter Two--The Two Fairy Queens: Spenser's Gloriana and Shakespeare's Titania	Pg. 45
5. Chapter Three--Amazon or Woman Warrior: Britomart, Hippolyta, and Elizabeth I	Pg. 69
6. Chapter Four--Spenser and Multiple Mirrors of Elizabeth	Pg. 89
7. Chapter Five--Shakespeare's <u>A Midsummer Night's Dream</u> and The Impact of Elizabeth I on Theatre	Pg. 111
8. Chapter Six--Female Sovereignty: Elizabeth I and the Power of Women	Pg. 127
9. Conclusion--A Final Glance at Elizabeth's Influence on her World	Pg. 147
10. Works Consulted	Pg. 161



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## Introduction

### Viewing Elizabethan England through Literature

In the opening of his Shakespearean Negotiations, Stephen Greenblatt describes writing as an outlet for the dead to speak to the living through “textual traces of themselves” that “make themselves heard in the voices of the living” (1). These textual traces form the foundation for the critical theory of New Historicism, which perceives such traces as a conduit for literary critics to learn about an author's view of the nation, and era, in which he or she lived. In “The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text,” Louis Montrose describes New Historicism in terms of interpretation: “a new historical criticism takes as its subject that interplay of culture-specific discursive *practices* in which versions of the Real are instantiated, deployed, reproduced—and also appropriated, contested, [and] transformed” (305). Literature and art, according to New Historicist theory, can demonstrate the impact of social and political factors because writers and artists can use their works to comment on their culture's values and their nation's future; indeed, the culture in which he or she lives affects an author and shapes how that writer comments on his or her country. In Renaissance Self-Fashioning, Greenblatt observes that “[l]iterature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes” (4). A writer's commentary provides an image of how that author perceives his or her time and

nation; therefore, critical examination of the literary works of a particular period can help to reveal the way people of the time thought about their society.

Looking back at previous time periods also allows a literary critic to consider an earlier era through the questions of his or her own time. Examination of men's treatment of women, past and present, encouraged the development of feminist critical theory. Joan Kelly argues that "[t]o take the emancipation of women as a vantage point is to discover that events that further the historical development of men, liberating them from natural, social, or ideological constraints" restrain and subordinate women ("Did Women have a Renaissance?" 19). Feminism "begins with a critique of patriarchal culture" and is concerned with "the impact of gender upon seeing and reading: how men write about women; how women read both men's and women's writing; [and] how feminine language and creativity differ from masculine language and creativity" (Richter 1063).<sup>1</sup> Such a reading means questioning the way women have typically been portrayed. Elaine Hobby's discussion in Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-88 observes that "[i]t is common today for people to assume that women in the past were as passive and modest—or as lusty and immoral—as such sources [law guidebooks, conduct books, sermons, and other ideological texts from the period] suggest" (8). According to a feminist perspective, these two options for perceiving women—submissive wife or immoral temptress—constitute imagery created by patriarchal points of view. Feminist critics, especially those from English-speaking countries, seek to "reconstitute the ways we deal with literature so as to do justice to female points

of view, concerns, and values" (Abrams 235). Feminism's pursuit of this goal requires the use of New Historicism to examine how patriarchal attitudes have influenced ideas about the role of women because constructing a new view of women means recognizing what shaped the current view.

Because of the presence of Queen Elizabeth I, Elizabethan England provides an opportunity to illuminate the way an unmarried female monarch affected a nation where men had dominated the government. Questions concerning Elizabeth's influence on male subjects and her means of controlling the men who tried to dominate her inherently possess a feminist character since they relate to how the patriarchal system of Elizabethan England insisted on "distinguishing male and female as superior and inferior, and interrelating them as complementary" (Montrosse 308). As Susan Staub notes in discussing Renaissance literature, "[i]t has become a commonplace of early modern studies that Renaissance woman had no legal existence apart from marriage. Maid, wife, or widow, she was governed by her relationship and subordination to her husband" (109). In "Shakespeare's Sister," Virginia Woolf describes the advantages William Shakespeare, one of Elizabethan England's best-known playwrights, possessed—education, money, and the opportunity to explore his talents—before creating a fictional sister "as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was" and depicting how pursuing her dreams would affect her (1079). Such a sister, argues Woolf, would not have received the same educational advantages; indeed, her loving parents would do their best to protect her from the harsh realities of a patriarchal society—where women were

primarily expected to marry and have children—by attempting to persuade her to accept a submissive role. Although records of the period suggest little effort to improve the lives of women, there are some critics, like Juliet Dusinberre and Carole McKewin, who note that Elizabeth's very presence and her capable handling of her role as sovereign helped to encourage consideration of women's potential in a new and positive light (Dusinberre 273).<sup>2</sup>

Critical study of Elizabethan England and its literature, through a New Historicist perspective influenced by Feminism, means examining and carefully evaluating Elizabeth's influence and how she used her image to maintain control of her domain. When Elizabeth came to the throne, she became queen of a society that adopted patriarchal attitudes at home and in government. Elizabeth, more than her immediate predecessors, created an atmosphere that allowed for the types of questions that writers and artists could consider in their works since a female ruler created an anomaly within the structure of a traditionally male-controlled government. Authors appreciated the relative peace her reign brought; however, her approach to the issues surrounding her as a female sovereign, especially the issues of marriage and her role as an unmarried female monarch, indirectly influenced literature that reflected on her reign. A New Historicist reading of literature from Elizabeth's reign, influenced by feminist questions, will demonstrate how the patriarchal society of England in the Sixteenth century helped shape Elizabeth's presentation of herself and the way her subjects perceived her.

Elizabeth's ascension to the throne increased anxiety about the succession and the future of the kingdom. Louis Montrosse notes that "as the anomalous ruler of a society that was pervasively patriarchal in its organization and distribution of authority, the unmarried woman at the society's symbolic center embodied a challenge to the homology between hierarchies of rule and of gender" (309). Patriarchal attitudes about rule generated difficulties, especially for Elizabeth's courtiers, in accepting a female sovereign, and Elizabeth's apparent unwillingness to do anything to set her subjects at ease about the future of England's government only worsened the situation. Early in her reign, when Parliament exhorted Elizabeth to marry, she asserted that she had long chosen to remain single and saw no reason to change that way of life simply because she had become queen (Camden 25-27). Elizabeth seemed to recognize the problems her approach to governing the realm caused and did her best to set the men around her at ease about her reign by listening to the people. For instance, Elizabeth's decision to use the title of governor rather than head of the church was rooted in the fact that some of her male subjects might have considered it "blasphemy that a woman could take this role" (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 14). Elizabeth was quick to realize that men would find it hard enough to accept a woman ruler. Her male subjects would likely have even greater difficulty in conceding to the idea of a female head of the church. Elizabeth sought to ease the concerns of the men around her by balancing ideals about women and the expectations of a ruler.

Patriarchal traditions suggested that governing a nation required the strength of a man. With this traditional view of government in mind, writers weighed the advantages and disadvantages of Elizabeth's marrying. Certainly, her marriage would have helped resolve the succession issue, but the possibility raised questions about two areas: control of England's government, and what influence—if any—Elizabeth's husband would have upon her governing of the kingdom. Because of the problems caused by the marriage of Elizabeth's sister, Mary Tudor, and Philip of Spain, many people in England questioned the wisdom of a marriage for Elizabeth if it meant placing any authority into the hands of a foreigner.<sup>3</sup> Also, if Elizabeth had married, she might have left England with her husband or died in childbirth. England would have had to wait still longer for a secure future if Elizabeth's husband took her away to his own country. Furthermore, if Elizabeth had died in childbirth but the child survived, a regent would have governed England for as long as the heir remained too young to serve the English population; this possibility could have caused a great deal of hardship for the people of England since there was no way to guarantee that a regent would handle England's government with the general population's best interests in mind. In the final analysis, Elizabeth's marriage could have secured the future of England through a stable succession; however, there were many risks involved. Her subjects pondered the issue, but, in the end, Elizabeth retained the right to decide for herself. Indeed, because they had to avoid angering her in order to maintain their privileged positions, even the members of



Elizabeth's council could not have forced Elizabeth to consent to a marriage if she considered a suitor unacceptable or force her to marry if she did not want to.

Any connection to a foreign court could complicate England's situation in the international world. With her kingdom already under attack for its religious status as a Protestant nation, Elizabeth desperately needed to prevent further diplomatic problems to maintain the safety of her kingdom and its people. The way she handled the idea of marriage sought to avoid diplomatic unpleasantness. Elizabeth allowed foreign suitors to court her but avoided definite promises.<sup>4</sup> In a speech to Parliament (1559) quoted by Camden, Elizabeth allowed that she might consider the possibility of marrying (27); however, she clearly preferred the idea of remaining unmarried and in full control of her domain. A society controlled by men found Elizabeth's desire to control her kingdom without a husband difficult to accept especially since other experiences with women in authority had been poor ones. Other women rulers—including Mary I of England, Catherine de Medici, Marie of Lorraine, and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots—had disturbed the patriarchal nature of the era because they showed that a woman could act the same way a male ruler might: "none of these women could be accused of shirking the violent action which defines manhood. As politicians they might severally have set the murderous Machiavel to school" (Dusinberre 273). Mary I of England and Catherine de Medici, in particular, violently reacted to Protestant factions in their kingdoms. Mary I, who was nicknamed "Bloody Mary," was a persecutor of Protestants who "provoked Knox's original outburst against female Catholic monarchs" while Catherine de

Medici "aroused the same anguished protests after the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day" (Dusinberre 273). Elizabeth would prove to be "the most respectable apple in a fairly rotten crop" (Dusinberre 273); however, as Carole Levin observes, in a time when religious divisions already caused problems in asserting a government's legitimacy, "the very existence of a woman ruler challenged traditionally held beliefs that the monarch as God's representative ought, by definition, to be male" ("Heart and Stomach" 2). Ironically, a patriarchal society might consider a capable queen unwomanly; however, womanly behavior would not help a queen handle the necessities of governing (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 3). Elizabeth needed to overcome her subjects' doubts in order to solidify her control of the kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of a female sovereign influenced the thinking of the English population during the reign of Elizabeth largely because of an increasing desire for a stable succession. This desire derived from the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and Henry VIII's changing the religion of England so as to divorce his first wife in order to pursue a second wife and, more particularly, to resurrect the hope of siring a male heir. Although the public liked Mary (Henry's surviving child by his first wife), dynastic needs propelled Henry toward divorce because "though it was not in fact true, some people in early-sixteenth-century England believed that a woman could not succeed to the crown" (Levin "Gender, Monarchy" 81). As Maggie Secara points out in A Compendium of Common Knowledge, 1558-1603: Elizabethan Commonplaces for Writers, Actors, and Reenactors, inheritance in Elizabethan England was still based on the rules of

primogenitor with the oldest son receiving the titles and the bulk of the money and property even if his sister or sisters were older.<sup>6</sup> Due to fears of civil strife that "would cost two hundred thousand men's lives" if the succession were not stabilized by the presence of a male heir, Henry VIII frantically sought a bride who could bear him a healthy legitimate son (Sitwell 39). Antonia Fraser acknowledges that Henry VIII "desperately wanted a son born in wedlock who could ultimately succeed to his throne unchallenged"(182); however, the change of religion he initiated to achieve that goal caused years of conflict. Edward VI, son of Henry VIII and his third wife, Jane Seymour, maintained the Protestant religion, but the reign of Catholic Mary I, daughter of Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, included severe purges of the Protestant religion. This constant upheaval forced the people of England to worry about the problems their choice of religion might create while also producing a crisis of concern about the sovereignty.

Although the people acknowledged Elizabeth's reign, it became increasingly clear that the nation wanted to have the issue of the succession settled. Elizabeth's marriage or official designation of an heir to the throne offered the best means of securing the future of England. Public propaganda efforts by Elizabeth attempted to ease concerns about female sovereignty and the lack of a designated heir, but lingering concerns about the succession issue and the possibility of Elizabeth's marrying found an outlet for expression in the literature and drama of the period. She carefully shaped her own presentation of herself to inspire the image others developed for her (Henderson 204).

Propagandizing use of imagery was not new, but Elizabeth had her own purposes for it. In taking charge of her kingdom, Elizabeth faced the prickly questions of establishing her legitimacy and confronting the issues of marriage and the succession. Her adoption of the Protestant iconography associated with her father, Henry VIII, and her brother, Edward VI, deterred people from publicly questioning her legitimacy. In addition, she utilized her self-image as a virgin queen to avoid unpleasantness about her decisions regarding suitors.

Furthermore, Elizabeth used her femininity to help control her courtiers. The concept of the Prince's two bodies—one natural and one politick—allowed her to acknowledge the weakness of her female body while emphasizing her possession of sovereign authority. By using the idea of the Prince's two bodies, Elizabeth maintained her status as sovereign without really changing the role of women. Instead, she asserted the idea of her reign as "a God-given exception" which avoided changes to "cultural attitudes or their theoretical justification" since "Elizabeth also sanctioned rather than challenged the oppression of other women" (Bowman 520). Essentially, Elizabeth's unique position permitted her to take some control of her own life, but she did not seek to change the traditional values associated with women. Instead, she used those ideas to create a perception that envisioned her as an exceptional woman God selected to help resolve the conflict between Catholic and Protestant factions in England. The idea of Elizabeth as divinely chosen made it easier for men to acquiesce to her authority and permit her to make her own choices about marriage.

Her femininity actually helped Elizabeth by providing a means to shape the way the men around her behaved. Elizabeth sought to use ideals about women to help control her courtiers. In many ways, Elizabeth utilized the patterns that had governed feudal women in positions of power. The medieval concept of courtly love provided important assistance to Elizabeth. Courtly love “made women the gift givers while men did the service” (Kelly “Did Women have a Renaissance?” 26). The tradition of courtly love allowed Elizabeth to treat her courtiers as most women treated their lovers. Elizabeth’s courtiers were her servants and imagery of sovereignty asserted her control of their privileges. They had to earn their privileges by winning her approval. They played the role of devoted servants to Elizabeth’s virgin queen by obliging her wishes and obeying her commands. Catering to Elizabeth’s fantasy of herself as a virgin queen, through poetry or their rhetorical approach to her, allowed her male courtiers to earn Elizabeth’s favor. Sir Walter Raleigh, for one, played along with Elizabeth’s wishes by writing poetry dedicated to her that expressed his devotion to her as his mistress (Oakeshott 27); indeed, the name Raleigh used to address Elizabeth in his poems, Cynthia, inspired Spenser’s character of Belphebe.<sup>7</sup> In playing their role, her courtiers sought to earn Elizabeth’s approval in order to maintain their power and wealth. As their sovereign, Elizabeth controlled the position of her courtiers because they depended upon her for power, prestige, and wealth. The men around her quickly learned that offending Elizabeth would only decrease their status; therefore, her courtiers avoided pressuring Elizabeth on the issue of marriage in order to maintain their place in the hierarchy of power.

Similarly, the patronage system encouraged authors who sought court privileges to create positive imagery of Elizabeth. The court factors that prevented discussion of the issue did not, however, preclude theatrical and literary exploration of the possibility of Elizabeth's marrying. Many people, including John Stubbs and members of Parliament, urged Elizabeth to marry for the sake of the nation's well being. It was feared that without a designated heir, the country would plunge into turmoil following Elizabeth's death.

Imagery was important to Elizabeth, but it did not answer all of the questions authors of the period had about her position in the English society of her time since she remained a woman while wielding the authority of the sovereign. The traditional image of a woman in Elizabeth's time, as described by Ann Ashworth, required a woman to be obedient, chaste, and silent (147). Women of the period were expected to marry, have children, and surrender all authority to their husbands.<sup>8</sup> As Elaine Hobby notes, "[w]omen were not supposed to enter the public world in any form" (1); however, Elizabeth, as sovereign, remained very much in the public eye. Carole Levin notes that John Aylmer, Lady Jane Grey's tutor, envisioned a queen as "someone modest, who wore simple dress, listened to advice, and married", but Elizabeth could not accept such restrictions for a queen as acceptable ("Heart and Stomach" 12). Nevertheless, as Louis Montrosse makes apparent, Elizabeth's special status as sovereign did not intrinsically change the restrictions placed on her (309). Actually, the expectations of women in the Sixteenth century remained true for Elizabeth, but they possessed a special significance in her case. For Elizabeth,

marriage meant forging a diplomatic alliance and providing an heir to the throne. William Camden quotes an appeal by the lower house of Parliament which expresses their desire for Elizabeth to secure the "[h]appiness hitherto received by your most gracious Government" by marrying and bringing "forth Children, Heirs both of their Mother's Vertue and Empire" (25-26). Still, while she remained unmarried, Elizabeth retained the ultimate authority of the sovereign and was the source of all advancement and reward. Since her chief concern was her nation's people, she put the good of her subjects before her own desires. In her Tilbury Camp speech (August 9, 1558), Elizabeth affirms her faith in the support of her people by stating that "I have placed my chiefest strength and goodwill in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects" (Fraser 210). Elizabeth, as queen, sought to rally her subjects and unite them around a common symbolism.

Evidence demonstrates that Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare sought to overcome Elizabeth's reservations about marriage. Through their handling of their characters, especially their respective fairy queens, Spenser and Shakespeare encouraged a positive view of Elizabeth's reign while observing that her refusal to settle the question of succession threatened the future of her kingdom. In The Faerie Queene, Spenser's allegorical use of new ideas about England's history at once acknowledged Elizabeth's reign as a divinely ordained time of peace and urged her to settle the succession in order to ensure the future of the realm.<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare, who had to deal with public performances of his A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, elected to use veiled

references to Elizabeth in the characters of Titania, the queen of the fairies, and Hippolyta, the Amazon love of Theseus. Through these two characters, Shakespeare illustrated both the good and the bad points about marriage while demonstrating the possibility of a husband and wife living harmoniously together—even if they were also a king and queen. Although Spenser's The Faerie Queene and Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream were published at a time when a marriage seemed less likely to produce an heir, their authors still begged Elizabeth to settle the succession so that England would not be thrown into troubled times after her death.

The very social and political factors that initiate New Historicist studies create the intertextual traces present in the works of authors of the same period since such writers were more likely to experience the same cultural factors. The questions about a woman's ability to rule and the need for a woman ruler to marry that were created by Elizabeth's presence on the throne indirectly influenced authors of the Elizabethan period. Elizabeth, as subject of a patriarchal social structure, chose to use patriarchal conceptions about women to assist her in controlling her realm. The patronage system permitted Elizabeth to manipulate authors and artists to promote favorable images of her; indeed, propaganda efforts by Elizabeth created an increasing use of imagery that encouraged a positive view of her reign. Many authors, including the courtiers around her who wrote verses specifically for Elizabeth to enjoy, took up the idea of representing Elizabeth as a sacred monarch. In The Lady of May, Sir Philip Sidney wrote the following, "To the Queen, Walking in Wanstead Garden as she



passed down into the Grove": "Your state is great, Your Greatness is our shield \ Your face hurts oft, but still it doth delight" (qtd. in Bradbrook The Queen's Garland13). George Peele and Richard Barnfield both wrote of Elizabeth as winning the golden apple from the Greek myth of the Judgement of Paris (Bradbrook The Queen's Garland14-15). Peele stated "[s]acred, imperial, and holy is her seat, \ Shining with wisdom, love and mightiness" (qtd. in Bradbrook The Queen's Garland15). Writers and courtiers who sought power or influence at court were especially influenced by propaganda imagery approved by Elizabeth and the court since it provided the tools to please Elizabeth.

Two of the best known authors of the period—Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare<sup>10</sup>—found themselves influenced by the ramifications of having a female sovereign on the throne. Questions about what role Elizabeth should play as an unmarried sovereign influenced Spenser's The Faerie Queene and Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream. Evidence suggests that characters in these works were intended to reflect the atmosphere of Elizabeth's court. The echoes of Queen Elizabeth's court in Spenser's The Faerie Queene and Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream praised her reign while reflecting the struggles between Elizabeth and her court about marriage offers and the succession. Spenser and Shakespeare, apparently recognizing the unstable nature of favor in the patronage system, avoided direct criticism of the lack of stability in the succession; instead, they used irony, imagery, and allegorical association to illustrate their point for their audience, which included Elizabeth. For instance, Britomart, a woman warrior Spenser depicted as an

ancestor of Elizabeth, served as the representative of chastity in his allegory. Britomart's destiny as the mother of Elizabeth's ancestral line strongly suggests a message to Elizabeth; evidence inherent in Spenser's depiction of Britomart indicates that Spenser intended to urge Elizabeth to secure England's destiny by naming a successor or otherwise providing for an heir to her throne. Spenser and William Shakespeare used their literary skills to create a presentation of Elizabeth that would at once please her and instruct her. New Historicist exploration of the intertextual links between Spenser's The Faerie Queene and Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream may demonstrate the way female control of the kingdom influenced ideas about female power and women's roles. Pointing out common elements, such as the use of fairy queens and virginal emblems, will demonstrate how Elizabeth influenced the literature of the Elizabethan era through her own manipulation of patriarchal imagery and her public persona.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The definition presented here originates from David H. Richter's introduction to Feminist theory. M.H. Abrams gives a description of Feminism that provides more facts about its focus on exposing the literary impact of patriarchy (233-239). Similarly, Joan Kelly speaks of women's history as needing to question accepted ideas about history. In "Did Women have a Renaissance?, " Kelly argues that changes in society between the Medieval period and the Renaissance not only changed the roles of women but increased patriarchal biases that made women submissive to men.

<sup>2</sup> In her "Shakespeare Liberata: Shakespeare, the Nature of Women, and the New Feminist Criticism," Carole McKewin discusses how Juliet Dusinberre rightly asserts that humanistic education of the Sixteenth century provided the focal point for a positive image of women (158).

<sup>3</sup> This problem is an issue of Chapter One (pp. 28-30) and Chapter Six (pp. 127-129).

<sup>4</sup> Courtship allowed Elizabeth a diplomatic tool to prevent confrontations with her potential enemies. Making enemies of foreign princes could place England in a perilous position; therefore, Elizabeth took care in handling foreign suitors. She refused to marry anyone she had not seen in person; yet, she avoided that step in virtually every courtship with a foreign suitor. Not meeting a foreign suitor was important because an official introduction "would be pushing the Courtship game farther than Elizabeth really wanted it to go" since such an introduction would eliminate virtually all options for easily evading an official engagement (Levin

"Heart and Stomach" 53-54). Susan Doran observes that Elizabeth would need the unanimous support of her privy councilors to receive approval of any matrimonial contract; indeed, "Had Elizabeth's council ever united behind any of her suitors she would have found great difficulty in rejecting his proposal"(41).

<sup>5</sup> Many critics—including Susan Doran, Carole Levin, and Juliet Dusinberre—have pondered how her subjects and courtiers responded to Elizabeth as queen. Julia Walker's Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana provides essays by a variety of authors that suggest the difficulties of Elizabeth's reign that were rooted in her unmarried status. As lengthy commentaries by Sheila Cavanagh (9-17), Carole Levin ("Gender and Monarchy" 79-87), and Ilona Bell (100-101) indicate, rumors about her virtue were rampant with reports of illegitimate children and relationships with her courtiers—particularly Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Furthermore, because Parliament doubted her capability, Elizabeth was urged to marry to relieve herself of the burden of governing alone.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Henry VIII's will stated his intention that the succession should pass from Edward to Mary and from Mary to Elizabeth (Fraser 202). Although the Catholic Church considered Elizabeth illegitimate, Henry's will reestablished her rights as princess and granted her a claim to the throne.

<sup>7</sup> Spenser acknowledges this fact in his letter to Raleigh: "I doe expresse in Belpheobe fashioning her name according to your own excellent conceipt of Cynthia" (16).

<sup>8</sup> A homily written during Elizabeth's reign asserts that obedience to a husband is a wife's way of showing obedience to God (Levin "The Heart and Stomach" 13). Still, although women were expected to obey a husband, Susan C. Staub, in analyzing crime literature about women, notes a trend toward marriage as a more companionable arrangement. In discussing women who had killed husbands that parental arrangements forced them to marry, Staub observes that the new encouragement of companionable marriage would not see these arranged marriages as true marriages.

<sup>9</sup> This point is particularly evident in two historical descriptions. In book II, Prince Arthur reads a history of Britain. The seer called Merlin, in Book III, prophesies about the descendants of Britomart and Artegall.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that Shakespeare studies provide many prominent though unproven theories about the "true identity" of the author responsible for William Shakespeare's plays. In a Time article published February 15, 1999, Howard Choa-Eoan demonstrates that the idea that Shakespeare's name concealed the true author remains vividly alive by examining the candidacy of Edward De Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, as the true Shakespeare. Since this theory, and others, suggests Shakespeare had access to Elizabeth's court similar to that of Edmund Spenser, a mention of these theories, including the candidacy of the Earl of Oxford, might support the assertion that Spenser and Shakespeare were from similar backgrounds and experienced similar influences.

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## Chapter One

### Elizabeth's Self Depiction

Attempting to examine a historical figure requires a scholar to observe how other people of the period viewed that individual; however, a person in the public eye could have intentionally manipulated the way authors, artists, and other people of his or her time perceived him or her. The idea of fashioning an identity was particularly important in sixteenth-century England since, as Stephen Greenblatt observes, “in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process” (Renaissance Self-Fashioning 2).<sup>1</sup> The structure of English society during Elizabeth’s reign created a great concern about image because, as Greenblatt asserts, power in Elizabethan England depended “upon its privileged visibility” (Shakespearean Negotiations 64). The potential for gaining support through the manipulation of public images became an important aristocratic skill;<sup>2</sup> indeed, Elizabeth manipulated her image through courtly love patterns and the idea of the Prince’s two bodies. Discerning her public depiction’s potential to help secure her reign, Elizabeth shaped the public’s perception of her to showcase her position as an exceptional woman and a savior of the Protestant cause.

Elizabeth’s need to establish her reign forced her to manipulate the imagery that authors and artists used in their representations of her. This manipulation helped Elizabeth deal with two issues: her legitimacy as an heir to the throne, and patriarchal concerns about her role as an unmarried female

sovereign. First of all, questions about the validity of the marriage of her father, King Henry VIII, and her mother, Anne Boleyn, plagued Elizabeth's claim to the throne. The presence of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, particularly tested Elizabeth's claim to England's throne since "[i]f the succession to the throne had gone by mere heredity, then strictly speaking Mary was the nearest heir, for not only was Elizabeth illegitimate by Catholic Canon Law, but, until Parliament could meet, she was also illegitimate by English law" (Neal 56). Though Henry VIII had claimed his marriage to Catherine of Aragon (which produced only one surviving child, Mary) was illegitimate because of Catherine's prior marriage to his deceased older brother, Arthur, the Pope had judged otherwise and refused to grant Henry freedom from his marriage (Fraser 182). Henry, wanting a legitimate son, responded by taking over the authority of the Church of England and dissolving his own marriage. The result of his subsequent marriage to Anne, Elizabeth, generated a furious reaction from Henry because he had not "put aside Catherine, his queen, [and] defied the Emperor and the Pope" for the birth of another daughter (Sitwell 9). In seeking a son and heir, Henry VIII produced another daughter whose heritage as a daughter of the king allowed her a questionable claim to the throne. Knowing the shaky nature of her claim to the throne, Elizabeth used the Protestant iconography associated with her father, and her brother—Edward VI, to help detract from concerns about her legitimacy. Elizabeth's decision to align herself with the Protestant religion alienated Catholic Church officials who already refused to recognize Elizabeth's inheritance of the English throne because they judged her to be an illegitimate child; indeed, the

Pope excommunicated Elizabeth and, in 1570, authorized her Catholic subjects to deny Elizabeth's supremacy (Fraser 205). Nevertheless, association with the Protestant religion justified Elizabeth's claim to the throne while also supporting the change in England's religion that had allowed her to be born in the first place.

The string of tragedies that plagued Elizabeth's childhood created a cautious nature that would serve her well in ruling the kingdom. Elizabeth's place in the succession fluctuated constantly from birth "as Henry VIII exchanged wives and religious positions" while she witnessed the rise and fall of others beginning with her mother who ended up sacrificed by Henry so he could continue to seek a male heir (Levine 13).<sup>3</sup> As Edith Sitwell observes, "like that daughter in whose reign England was to begin her greatness, Anne Boleyn 'danced high.' But she did not 'dance disposedly' " (52). Whether or not she was guilty of the charges, Anne Boleyn died for adulterous behavior, which made Elizabeth "the offspring of an officially condemned incestuous adulterer" (Cavanagh 20); therefore, Elizabeth would want to distance herself as much as possible from any unfavorable connection to her mother to avoid uncomfortable reminders of her mother's fate. Not only did Elizabeth lose her own mother at a young age, but Elizabeth's early life also witnessed the death of her first stepmother, Jane Seymour, after the birth of Edward VI, and another stepmother's beheading for adultery.<sup>4</sup> Seeing many of the people at court die or disappear, Elizabeth learned to avoid any questionable behavior. The uncertainty surrounding Elizabeth's position left "little room for skepticism about her political intentions, her private allegiances, or her virtue" (Cavanagh 9). Elizabeth lived with

constantly watching what she said and did; indeed, she spent a great deal of her time trying to decide who to trust and where her allegiance belonged. In order to strengthen her claim to the throne, Elizabeth chose to ally herself with her male relatives, especially Henry VIII and Edward VI, rather than her female relations—including her sister Mary.<sup>5</sup>

Her early life's lessons in the value of political caution affected the way Elizabeth handled initiating policy—especially rules about the government's approach to religion. Antonia Fraser asserts that Elizabeth demonstrated extraordinary restraint in "trying hard to reduce the severity of the Draconian laws against her Catholic subjects" (207). Taking no radical action toward making amends with the Catholic Church would ease the fears of her Protestant subjects, but Elizabeth's Catholic subjects also had to be mollified in order to prevent discontent. Elizabeth, however, wanted to do more than appease both sides. She encouraged tolerance in hopes of uniting her subjects, making her kingdom easier to manage, and gaining the loyalty of her subjects. As a female sovereign, Elizabeth desperately required the support of her subjects in order to defend herself against male courtiers who remained skeptical of her ability to rule. Elizabeth's control of the kingdom and her court depended on how much popular support she could maintain; indeed, public support equaled strength in dealing with the men around her. Without the support of her subjects, Elizabeth would have had a more difficult time getting her policies accepted.

To obtain her population's support, Elizabeth had to promote a favorable image that would distance her from the image of previous female sovereigns.

Other female sovereigns from the Sixteenth century, most of whom were Catholic, demonstrated a ruthless attitude in dealing with religious conflicts:

Sixteenth century Europe boasted a plethora of notorious female sovereigns: Bloody Mary Tudor, who persecuted the Protestants and provoked Knox's original outburst against female Catholic monarchs; Catherine de Medici, who aroused the same anguished protests in France after the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day; Mary Queen of Scots; The Scottish Queen Regent, Marie of Lorraine; Henri IV's widow, the Regent Marie de Medici, hated mother of Henrietta Maria. (Dusinberre 273)

Among Elizabeth's female predecessors, her sister, Mary, slaughtered people who opposed her effort to institute a return of the Catholic religion. Mary, stubborn and strong-willed, devoted herself to the memory of her mother, Catherine of Aragon, and failed to learn the necessity of compromise (Fraser 195). The ruthless responses of Mary I and other Catholic queens had created fear and loathing. Elizabeth had to appear in a positive light to overcome doubts about a female ruler's ability to govern; therefore, she also had to make herself accessible to her subjects. Elizabeth used her court progresses—movements through the countryside—as a means of bringing herself before her people. In Palaces and Progresses of Elizabeth I, Ian Dunlop comments on how the Tudors and Stuarts persisted in moving "from place to place, maintaining an astonishing number of royal houses, but availing themselves also of the lavish hospitality of their richer subjects" (115). By providing opportunities for her subjects to see her

and request her assistance, Elizabeth encouraged a perception of her as concerned about all of her people rather than just her courtiers.

In manipulating her public image, Elizabeth went beyond support of her legitimacy and her ability to rule; she sought control of her court. Besides using Protestant icons to help establish the legitimacy of her claim to the throne, Elizabeth employed imagery that advocated her ability to rule to confront the difficulties of maintaining control of her kingdom when men did not trust a woman's capacity for ruling. As discussed in the Introduction, patriarchal expectations of male dominance at court created a possibility of resentment and concern from the male courtiers surrounding Elizabeth.<sup>6</sup> Patriarchal attitudes doubted a woman could even legally inherit the throne (Levin "Gender, Monarchy" 81); in fact, even if a woman did ascend to the throne, her husband would be expected to help her govern the realm. According to Susan Doran, "sixteenth-century patriarchal society believed that a wife should always defer to her husband when making decisions" (33). These expectations about women rulers and government forced Elizabeth to carefully manipulate the political situation to overcome the restrictions they created. Especially in the early years of her reign, Elizabeth was urged to marry and settle the succession by producing an heir (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 44). However, in a 1559 speech to Parliament, Elizabeth responded to requests that she marry by stating "[y]ea to satisfie you, I have already joined my self in Marriage to a Husband, namely, the Kingdom of *England*" (Camden 27). Although many of her advisors urged her to marry for the sake of securing her people's future, Elizabeth chose to avoid

allying herself with a man in order to keep direct control of her kingdom and maintain her role as the social center of her court with the men around her as courtly lovers (Doran 33-34). As Susan Doran, Carole Levin, and Ilona Bell rightly point out, Elizabeth saw no reason to jeopardize her authority by marrying. As an unmarried queen, Elizabeth didn't need to answer to any man; however, if she became a wife, she would have to obey a husband (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 43). This fact meant that "[m]arriage to anyone would have robbed Elizabeth of power and have been potentially divisive" to the religious cohesiveness of her realm (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 8). Elizabeth did not want to lose her control of the governing of England; in fact, Elizabeth has been quoted as having said, "I will have here but one Mistress, and no Master" (qtd. in Levin "Heart and Stomach" 47). Indeed, a Scottish ambassador, quoted by Ilona Bell in "'Soveraigne Lord of lordly Lady of this Land': Elizabeth, Stubbs, and the Gaping Gulf," remarked on the importance of Elizabeth's unmarried state in the following words: "ye think if ye were married, ye would be but Queen of England, and now ye are King and Queen both; ye may not suffer a commander" (109). Continuing to rule as an unmarried woman allowed Elizabeth to enjoy the pleasures of courtship without obligating her to obey any man.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Elizabeth strove to maintain the peace and prosperity of her people. Elizabeth's decision to remain unmarried prevented an entanglement with another country that might have forced England's involvement in that country's interests and increased England's political problems. As a Protestant nation, England inhabited a precarious position in the international political and religious world.

Elizabeth could not risk war with Catholic nations or public alliances with other Protestant nations.<sup>8</sup> By avoiding a consort, Elizabeth kept herself free of allegiance to a man while also preventing complications in relations with other countries.

As time went on, Elizabeth had to deal with concerns about her continuing unmarried state. Indeed, the patriarchal attitude that urged her to marry forced Elizabeth to concern herself with the need to ease doubts about the ability of an unmarried woman to rule effectively. Carole Levin observes that part of the difficulty Elizabeth faced was men who did not see a woman as capable of handling the rigors of governing the realm:

Many of the English reacted with ambivalence to the idea of a woman ruler. The ambivalence centered directly on the conflict between her rule and her femininity. If a queen were confidently to demonstrate the attributes of power, she would not be acting in a womanly manner; yet womanly behavior would ill-fit a queen for the rigors of rule. ("The Heart and Stomach" 3)

Elizabeth knew her position as an unmarried female sovereign was a unique circumstance that allowed her greater control and freedom, and she maintained a self-image that highlighted her position as an exception to the rule of male dominance. Indeed, Stephen Greenblatt declares that, though Elizabeth "had at once mobilized, manipulated, and successfully resisted decades of anxious male attempts to see her married," even Elizabeth would not accept such a career for "any woman of lesser station" (Shakespearean Negotiations 69). Elizabeth's



image as an unmarried woman provided her with a means of controlling her court because her femininity allowed her to manipulate the men around her. Single life allowed Elizabeth to avoid public outrage over her chosen consort while also keeping the sovereign authority in her own hands. The ultimate authority of the reigning sovereign benefited Elizabeth since it prevented most of her male courtiers from daring to question her motives; indeed, she clearly took full advantage of the special position she inhabited. Elizabeth enjoyed her relationships with many of the men who served her as administrators and courtiers and expressed her affection by giving them nicknames: Robert Dudley, "her Eyes"; Burghley, her "Spirit"; Walsingham, her "Moon"; and Hatton, her "Bellwether" (Oakeshott 26). The men around her knew Elizabeth's command of the realm meant she controlled the privileges they were allowed to possess; therefore, they dared not anger her and lose her favor. Even courtiers and advisors who received nicknames as signs of Elizabeth's affection could not take their position for granted. That regard was not without its difficulties since she would often withdraw such favor when she was angered. Her favor varied according to the needs of the political situation, and her courtiers knew it. Anything that would threaten the balance of power at court, like marriages Elizabeth did not know about and approve, worried Elizabeth; such incidents also indicated a loss of her control over her court, which caused her to withdraw her favor from admirers who "turned their eyes elsewhere" (Oakeshott 26). Raleigh, for example, fell out of favor when he married without telling Elizabeth.<sup>9</sup>

Elizabeth's favorites had to walk a thin line between pleasing her and living their own lives. Failure meant losing at least some of their power at court.

Propagandizing manipulation of her public image played a role in allowing Elizabeth to ease the fears resulting from her ascension to the throne as an unmarried woman and to persuade the people of England that she could rule effectively without a consort. For instance, the concept of the Prince's two bodies, which implied that a ruler possessed two parts—one "body natural" and one "body politick," proved helpful to Elizabeth's public presentation since it allowed her to acknowledge her gender while maintaining her right to rule.<sup>10</sup> For Elizabeth, this idea meant that she had a female "body natural" while retaining the "body politick" of a sovereign. Diana Henderson describes Elizabeth's use of the idea of the Prince's two bodies as uniting "the role of the female as mediator or symbol of sovereignty, found in traditional ceremonies and pageants, with the direct, official power of the king" (112). Elizabeth used the concept of the Prince's two bodies to her advantage by routinely referring to herself as the prince or king rather than princess or queen. Mary Villeponteaux, who also provides examination of the concept in "'not as woman wonted be': Spenser's Amazon Queen", states the following about Elizabeth's use of the Prince's two bodies:

Rather than representing herself as a woman, but also a prince—thus identifying a female body natural and a male body politic—Elizabeth most often refers to herself as a single sex or as two bodies politic, as in the

Golden Speech, when she claims both “the glorious name of a king” and the “royall authority of a queen”. (211)

In other words, Elizabeth elected to use male imagery in justifying her governing of the realm while feminine imagery defended her life as an unmarried queen. Male perceptions of women influenced presentations of her femininity; however, her public stance as ruler utilized association with male sovereignty. Often, calling herself king strengthened Elizabeth’s authority or deflected any criticism of Elizabeth’s actions by reminding the courtiers around her that, while she might be fallible in her “body natural,” her “body politick” maintained the authority of the reigning prince.

The legal methods of censorship and propaganda also played a part in Elizabeth’s plan to exploit the power of her public image. Elizabeth recognized that her position as sovereign made her a frequent subject of the art and literature created during her reign (Henderson 10). Because the 1559 Parliament instituted a definition of treason that included any suggestion that Elizabeth should not be queen, she possessed the power to suppress at least some of the works of art and writings that offended her (Levin “Gender, Monarchy” 87). Rob Content observes that the public declarations asserted that such works violated the law because they were libelous or slanderous (“Faire is Fowle” 229). Those authors or artists who created offensive representations of Elizabeth or wrote essays or poems about her that Elizabeth disliked quickly learned their lesson. For instance, John Stubbs, author of “The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be Swallowed by an other French Marriage”, lost a hand for

writing against the possibility of Elizabeth marrying the French Duke of Alencon.<sup>11</sup> According to Ty F. Buckman, Stubbs's true crime consisted of his "stated intention of 'stirring up' the Queen's subjects [which] made him, in Elizabeth's eyes, a spreader of sedition" (134). Others who attempted to advise her on marriage, like Philip Sidney, were more careful to avoid offending the queen.

As Roy C. Strong states in The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry, "[t]he Elizabethan monarchy did not only need powerful verbal and visual images to hold a divided people in loyalty; it also demanded the development of an elaborate ritual and ceremonial with which to frame and present the Queen to her subjects as the sacred virgin whose reign was ushering in a new golden age of peace and plenty" (114). Since it was important for the public to see Elizabeth's reign presented in a favorable light, developing and promoting complimentary imagery became even more important than suppressing unfavorable representations; therefore, Elizabeth used her position as sovereign to encourage authors and artists to create a positive image of her. Knowing that Elizabeth controlled the reigns of power, authors and artists realized that developing a favorable presentation of her provided an opportunity for gaining respect, privilege, and the ear of the monarch. Edmund Spenser was one author who wrote in praise of Elizabeth in hopes of gaining her favor; however, he "failed to find a post at court even when he had dedicated *The Faerie Queene* to his sovereign" (Fraser 20). Chances of gaining favor solely through flattering writings or art about Elizabeth remained minimal, but Elizabeth

must have encouraged any positive propaganda produced in the realm since a flattering image of the queen possessed the potential to increase public support of Elizabeth and her reign.

As the likelihood of Elizabeth's death increased over the years, fear about the future of the succession grew. While praise of her continued, people wanted to see the succession settled; indeed, even her court urged Elizabeth to answer the questions that still surrounded the issue of who would rule after her. The way she handled her public presentation assisted Elizabeth in controlling her court while delaying settlement of the succession. Even as she grew older, Elizabeth sought to hide the ravages of age in order to maintain her own self-image as a beautiful virgin queen and ease her subjects' concerns about her mortality. Her council assisted Elizabeth's pursuit of a timeless image by declaring, in 1594, that "the official image of the Queen in her final years was to be of a legendary beauty, ageless and unfading" (Strong Gloriana 20). For public appearances and events at court, Elizabeth wore wigs and heavy make-up to preserve a youthful image: "Marvellous in jewels and ruff, Gloriana was almost sixty, and had resorted to an auburn wig to hide her thinning hair, and a liberal use of cosmetics" (Fraser 211). Literary and artistic presentation of her became static; indeed, her image in poetry and portraits developed into a mask—a mask of youth (Hackett 19). With no official artist at court, Elizabeth had little direct control over her artistic presentation; tradition, however, provided a means of manipulating the use of her image through the process of portrait patterns (Strong Gloriana 16). In speaking of the portrait pattern process, Roy Strong

expresses the idea that "[t]he pattern process is important, in that it explains how so many different hands produced the same face mask" (Gloriana 16). Elizabeth sat for her portrait as queen only once; after that, most artists used a pattern of her face created from that sitting (Strong Gloriana 14-16). For all her efforts, Elizabeth could not avoid her own mortality. One of Elizabeth's favorite activities was dancing, and, as Edith Sitwell describes, "[s]he danced, as she did everything, to fight the shadow of death" (31). Elizabeth's desire to avoid thoughts of her own mortality made the idea of the fairy queen attractive to her. The concept of the fairy queen included a sense of immortality that prevented fears about the future of England without Elizabeth.

The idea of Elizabeth as a virgin queen developed into the concept of the Cult of Gloriana, which Roy Strong depicts as encouraging admiration of the queen as an exceptional woman sent by God to help end the religious strife in the kingdom (Gloriana 43-44). That cult took advantage of well-known imagery to help develop the Queen's image and maintain order in the kingdom: "The Cult of Gloriana was skillfully created to buttress public order and, even more, deliberately to replace the pre-reformation externals of religion, the cult of the Virgin, and saints with their attendant images, processions, ceremonies, and secular rejoicing" (Strong Cult 16). The cult of Gloriana was largely Protestant and used the iconography of Henry VIII and Edward VI, but it did find a purpose for some Catholic imagery. Connecting Elizabeth to the Catholic icon of the Virgin Mary proved particularly useful since that association highlighted Elizabeth's stated chief concern—the welfare of her nation and the subjects who

lived within her realm. In Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, Roy C. Strong explains that Elizabeth's imagery revived the medieval ruler image cult and the idea of divine right through "the hieratic icon-like images of the virgin Queen" (38). Elizabeth's decision to retain a virginal image played an important role in helping her to deal with being a female ruler who also encouraged portrayals of herself as the mother of her people and protector of her subjects' interests. Elizabeth's virginity, which was "central to all representations of the queen," promoted a sense of the sacredness of Elizabeth's position that emphasized her divine right as monarch (Henderson 106). As the queen chosen by God to lead her people out of a time of religious strife, Elizabeth deserved a special position in the social world of England. This imagery of Elizabeth helped shape the public image that assisted her in creating the policies she wanted to initiate.

Elizabeth's depiction as a godly prince chosen to save her people from religious strife drew upon Elizabeth's desire to unite her people. Elizabethan England's society consisted of a variety of religious groups—Catholic, Protestant, and Puritan—and classes—old and new aristocrats, rising and declining gentry, a burgeoning urban class, and peasantry (Strong Cult 116). This fact created a need for a unifying force, and Elizabeth sought to become that force.<sup>12</sup> Strong suggests that Elizabeth's presence and the way she handled her people assisted in developing a symbol the people of England could unite around:

The Elizabethan monarchy, by dodging and leaving unanswered many crucial issues, by exploiting—and being fortunate enough to

be blessed with—a remarkable woman, was able to cut across this fundamental divisiveness and find in the Crown an ambiguous symbol which held the hearts and minds of all its peoples.

(Cult 116)

Since the greatest division among the English population remained the religious question, Elizabeth's approach to religion encouraged a tolerant view of other people's religious beliefs. From the start, she used the Protestant iconography that had been associated with her father and brother; however, she did not use it as a means of enforcing the Protestant religion.<sup>13</sup> Instead, she strove to use the imagery—such as “the sword and the book” iconography—to encourage tolerance of other people's religious views. For her, the icon of the book—indicating the Bible—remained the most important; indeed, even at her coronation, Elizabeth emphasized the Bible's value as a means of learning the truth of God's word:

Between was a cave from which Time emerged, leading his daughter Truth who carried an English Bible in her hand.... The Bible it was, continued the expounder, that taught the way to bring a commonwealth from a decayed to a flourishing state; to bring it—who could doubt the implication?—from what it had been in the reign just ended. Truth presented her book to the Queen, who received and kissed it and with both hands held it up and then laid it on her breast, giving great thanks to the City for it. (Neal 62)



In analyzing this event, John King asserts that Elizabeth's actions "restored the Bible to the place it had enjoyed as a means of spiritual instruction" since granting such importance to receiving the gift of a Bible encouraged her subjects to value it as well (Tudor Iconography 104). Elizabeth encouraged tolerance by presenting herself in a way that promoted the use of the Bible as a guide to religious truth. Her own image as a faithful student of the Bible demonstrated its value to her. It seems likely that the importance of the Bible to their new queen subtly encouraged her subjects to value the Bible's teachings as Elizabeth did.

Historical evidence suggests that Elizabeth favored images of herself as the mediator of the religious questions in her realm. The idea of the golden mean appealed to her; indeed, the golden mean was what she sought to achieve. Her image in "The Rainbow Portrait" illustrates this link between Elizabeth and the golden mean. Current understanding conceives of rainbows, appearing after rainstorms, as an indication of the return of peace in the natural world after a time of strife and adversity. Because of their biblical origin as a sign of God's covenant with man through Noah, rainbows have come to typify peace and a return of godly governing. Since Elizabeth believed in bible study, she probably knew the story of Noah's Ark where the rainbow first appears. In the case of her "Rainbow Portrait," the multiple colors of the rainbow could be indicative of the diverse people of her kingdom with Elizabeth lovingly reaching out to them. Since Elizabeth's golden mean intended to bring peace to the spiritual situation in England, her depiction with a rainbow, which is "the traditional symbol of peace" demonstrated her commitment to peace and

harmony in England's spiritual world by renewing trust in the word of God as presented in the Bible (Strong Gloriana 158). Because her effort to achieve the golden mean brought about a time of peace and stability after the strife of previous reigns, examination of Elizabeth's "Rainbow Portrait" indicates that it suitably depicts the golden mean in relation to her by showing Elizabeth with her hand over a rainbow.

Through the propagandizing use of her image, Elizabeth hoped to overcome resistance to the idea of an unmarried female as queen. Although her people feared the uncertainty of the future, Elizabeth wished to persuade her subjects that, as a godly prince sent to end the religious strife, her duty did not require marriage; therefore, she exploited concepts about England's past and the Bible's role in spiritual instruction to urge acceptance of the idea that God's will decreed that she should reign unmarried. In the words of Antonia Fraser, "she saw it as her mission to unite a divided people and she came to embody a truly national consciousness with such success that she gave her name to an age" (202). Elizabeth had her admirers and her critics, but she pursued what she considered her mission as sovereign and attempted to make people see her as she wanted them to perceive her. In the end, the fact that Elizabeth succeeded in creating an atmosphere that generated a great deal of literature speaks well of her success in getting people—Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare included—to consider the significance of her reign.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh provides a good example of the self-fashioning that occurred in the Elizabethan court. To Elizabeth, he presented himself as “a passionate lover pursuing a remote and beautiful lady” (Greenblatt Sir Walter Raleigh 25). His place at court shifted “[f]rom an obscure, powerless gentleman of slender means, a young soldier who” arrived at court without special qualifications or powerful friends to captain of the queen’s guard and a personal favorite of Elizabeth (Greenblatt Sir Walter Raleigh 74). He recognized “the slippery position of favorite in a dangerous, envious, and constantly shifting court” but managed to maintain that position from autumn 1582 to the summer of 1592 (Greenblatt Sir Walter Raleigh 55). Raleigh’s relationship with the queen would control the rest of his life (Greenblatt Sir Walter Raleigh 80). Other high placed court members were similarly affected by dependence on the queen including Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Greenblatt observes that Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier paints the ideal courtier as “a consummate performer, an actor who can transform the ugly and ragged conflicts of reality into a harmonious work of art” (Sir Walter Raleigh 34). To maintain power, courtiers required their sovereign’s favor, and Elizabeth’s court was no exception. In Elizabethan England, people like Sir Walter Raleigh and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, played the role their position at court required—obedient servants to the queen—to increase their chances of gaining, and maintaining, favor. For instance, Sir Walter Raleigh, who became one of Elizabeth’s favorites and gained prestige through that friendship, knew

"his career always remained dependent upon the queen's favor" (Greenblatt Sir Walter Raleigh 74). Elizabeth's courtiers made their bid for power by courting her as if Elizabeth was a mistress they were in love with. Elizabeth's court and her approach to her courtiers led to "a court thronged with suitors begging for a chance to 'serve' their royal mistress" (Whigham 11).

<sup>3</sup> Sitwell's examination of Elizabeth's early life observes that Anne Boleyn, already in a dangerous position because of Henry VIII's disappointment at their lack of a son, made comments that allowed suspicions about her faithfulness to Henry and their wedding vows (20-22, 37-38, 95-96). With Anne's fidelity in question, Henry VIII charged her with treason and executed her. Anne's death allowed him to marry for the third time. That marriage, to Jane Seymour, produced the son Henry so desperately wanted.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Howard, like Anne Boleyn, was executed for betraying her vows to Henry VIII (Fraser 189).

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth's decision to avoid association with her female relations would not, however, affect the use of female ancestors as part of her literary presentation. In Spenser's The Faerie Queene, the character of Britomart is depicted as an ancestress of Elizabeth I (3.1.49). The history of England narrated in The Faerie Queene (Book 2, Canto 10) also includes mentions of female rulers such as Gwendolene and Cordelia.

<sup>6</sup> See pages 4-5 in the Introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Notably, Doran cites John Aylmer's argument that a married queen could maintain her authority by separating her private and public roles (34). If Aylmer

was right, Elizabeth could have married without allowing her role as wife to supercede her role as queen.

<sup>8</sup> Sadly, Elizabeth did not avoid using military force. The defeat of the Spanish Armada is a celebrated victory of her reign.

<sup>9</sup> Marriages among her court members were a particularly sore point for Elizabeth. Sir Walter Raleigh suffered imprisonment and other disasters following his marriage (Oakeshott 41-46). Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, also angered Elizabeth when he secretly married Lettice Knollys (See note in Watkins 202-203). Elizabeth's carefully crafted image helped her maintain a balance of power in the government. Every marriage within her court created a change that Elizabeth found unsettling and resulted in divided loyalties in the men and women involved (Doran 33). See comments by Watkins (202n) and Susan Doran (32) for further insight into this idea.

<sup>10</sup> In a speech at Tilbury Camp (August 9, 1558), Elizabeth said, "I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King" (qtd. in Fraser 210). Once she had established her right to the throne, the idea that Elizabeth was, as sovereign, the "body politick" chosen by God to rule England encouraged obedience and attention to her policies.

<sup>11</sup> Stubbs's reaction to his punishment makes his story all the more poignant since he maintained loyalty to Elizabeth. Reports give his words at the scaffold as "God save the Queen." See the account of the incident in Ilona Bell's piece in Julia Walker's essay collection, Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana (112-114).

<sup>12</sup> Antonia Fraser refers to this search for unity as the mission Elizabeth gave herself: "She saw it as her mission to unite a divided people" (202). The rainbow imagery of her time might be associated with the diversity of the people of England.

<sup>13</sup> John N. King's Tudor Royal Iconography offers extensive exploration of the Tudor dynasty's use of particular icons. One in particular is "the sword and the book," which he explores in chapter two of the text. King, in speaking of Elizabeth, says, "[m]uch more common than presentations of the queen with the Sword and the Book are her portrayals as the Protestant heroine and savior of England who reads or carries a bible or evangelical book" (104). Elizabeth's use of "the sword and the book" iconography remained essentially passive. Her image served as a model for studying theology rather than actively extolling the virtues of Protestantism. By using the imagery in a more passive way, Elizabeth could acknowledge her own debt to Protestantism without offending her Catholic subjects.

## Chapter Two

### The Two Fairy Queens: Spenser's Gloriana and Shakespeare's Titania

If, as New Historicism asserts, literature can reflect the nation and times the author inhabits, the works of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare should address the issues that were important to the general population of Elizabethan England. Since studies by authors such as Carole Levin and Julia Walker indicate that the presence of a female monarch became an overriding concern for the people of Elizabethan England, consideration of Elizabeth's influence on the nation she governed should prove important to understanding the literary work of the period. An examination of the characters of Edmund Spenser's Gloriana and William Shakespeare's Titania provides an appropriate venue for exploring how Spenser's The Faerie Queene and Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream were affected by the ongoing debate about the power of their unmarried female sovereign and what role she should play.

Gloriana, the queen of fairy land, served as an acknowledged representation of Elizabeth in Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene and reflected Spenser's desire to gain his sovereign lady's favor. Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh confirmed that Gloriana was intended to represent Elizabeth as sovereign: "In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land" (The Faerie Queene 16). Indeed, Spenser, who sought the queen's favor, dedicated his work to Elizabeth as he bid her look favorably on the author and "consecrate these his labovrs to live with

the eternitie of her fame" (Spenser 37). In The Faerie Queene, Spenser's proems called upon Elizabeth often, and by different names—holy virgin chief of mine, great lady of the greatest isle, fairest princess under sky, my sovereign, the queen of love, and prince of peace from heaven blessed—as he requested her aid in performing the task he had selected for himself. W.B.C. Watkins observes that Spenser's "personal inclinations and the design of the *Faerie Queene* are self-consciously aristocratic" (52). Spenser's praise of Elizabeth was designed with the Tudor dynasty's concept of England's history in mind. Watkins insists that "Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was the first attempt on a grand scale to embody the new political-historical conception of England" (44). The Tudor dynasty claimed descent from Trojan leaders: "For instance, Britain came to be said to have been founded by Brutus, the grandson of Aeneas. This genealogy affiliated the dominant order of England with the great orders of Rome and Troy through Geoffrey of Monmouth's fanciful lineage" (Whigham 86). This version of the history of England's monarchy is delineated in the book Prince Arthur reads at Alma's castle, which opens with Brutus creating a New Troy in Britain after defeating the Giants then in charge (Spenser 2.10.9.6). By including this sense of England's history, Spenser also predicted and pointed "the way to future greatness" (Watkins 45). Spenser used this history in a way that urged Elizabeth to continue the family line in order to end the religious dilemmas of the recent reigns of her brother, Edward VI, and her sister Mary. Spenser's use of Tudor historiography and iconography asserted that Elizabeth was destined by her ancestry to rule. Elizabethan propaganda asserted that God chose Elizabeth to



serve as the sovereign destined to guide England out of the turmoil created by the Reformation. In conceiving The Faerie Queene, Spenser sought to promote Protestant oriented propaganda in hopes of gaining Elizabeth's favor; however, his success was minimal: "Edmund Spenser failed to find a post at court even when he had dedicated *The Faerie Queene* to his sovereign" (Fraser 207). He found a friend in Sir Walter Raleigh, who brought him to court to present the first three books of The Faerie Queene to Elizabeth, but all that his work earned Spenser was talk of being the new laureate and "a pension by the crown" (Oakeshott 38). The pension rewarded him, but the glory and prestige Spenser hoped for eluded him in spite of his praise of Elizabeth.

In "The Faery Queen Unveiled? Five Glimpses of Gloriana," Jeffrey Paul Fruen describes the character of Gloriana as representing the guiding light that leads noble men to a virtuous life (60-61).<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Reid similarly reflects on this almost celestial sense of Gloriana's presence:

Spenser's recondite Gloriana is associated with the transcendent reality of God, her beatific presence revealed in prophetic dream-visions to the heroically worthy, or mirrored in righteous earthly analogues (Una, Belphoebe, Britomart, Mercilla) whose veils and armor usually guard their moral purity and power. (21)

Prince Arthur remembers the vision of Gloriana as a divine gift that he vowed to be worthy of (Spenser 1.9.13-14). He tells Una and the Redcrosse Knight that when he awoke to find Gloriana gone, he vowed to love and serve that divine image until the day he could find her again (Spenser 1.9.15). In The Meaning of

Spenser's Fairyland, Isabel Rathborne speaks of Gloriana as connected to "all the fairy queens of Celtic myth and medieval romance" with her favor being the crowning glory of her knights (217). Her knights, as depicted by Spenser, seek to do her honor and earn her favor. The Redcrosse Knight journeys to aid Una and to earn the distinction of Gloriana's favor (Spenser 1.1.4). Sir Guyon mentions the "Order of *Maydenhead*, the most renowned, \ That may this day in all the world be found"—probably a reference to a knightly order honoring chastity, the main virtue Elizabeth sought to be associated with—as the highest tribute granted to a knight by Gloriana (Spenser 2.2.42). Gloriana's knights' pursuit of her favor reflects Elizabeth's court. Like Elizabeth, Gloriana is the unmarried ruler of her domain and controls a court composed primarily of men. Gloriana's courtiers are her knights, and she sends them on whatever missions she deems appropriate. In Canto I of Book I, Spenser wrote the following reflection of the Redcrosse Knight's hopes for glory as that knight's adventure commences:

Upon a great aduenture he was bond  
 That greatest *Gloriana* to him gaue,  
 That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faerie* lond,  
 To winne him worship, and her grace to haue,  
 Which of all earthly things he most did craue. (1.1.3)

Gloriana ordered her knights to complete quests or perform tasks that she assigned to earn her favor. For instance, according to the following quote from Spenser's letter to Raleigh, Gloriana sent Guyon to capture Acrasia:

The second day ther came in a Palmer bearing an Infant with bloody hands, whose Parents he complained to have bene slayn by an Enchauntresse called Acrasia: and therfore craved of the Faery Queene to appoint him some knight, to performe that aduenture, which being assigned to Sir Guyon, he presently went forth with that same Palmer. (Spenser 17)<sup>2</sup>

Gloriana knows that she has the sovereign authority to send her knights to do what she pleases. Gloriana's knights understand quite well that their reputation, their honor, and their hopes for achieving glory rested upon their faithful service to their sovereign. Similarly, Elizabeth's courtiers knew serving her could position them to receive honor, glory, and privileged positions at court. The men around Elizabeth recognized her sovereign power and dared not offend her.

Janet M. Green's analysis of the Tilbury camp speech (August 9, 1558) in "'I myself': Queen Elizabeth's Oration at Tilbury Camp" insists that Elizabeth's "frequent references in her speeches to God are another means of presenting herself as worthy and virtuous" (427). Elizabeth coveted recognition as God's representative on Earth, a distinction that Spenser seems to have granted Gloriana by describing her domain as the godliest kingdom outside of God's own realm. A comparison of Gloriana's capital to the New Jerusalem asserts that her city, Cleopolis, comes as close as the earthly world can to God's realm (Spenser 1.10.59). In fact, the hermit who shows the Redcrosse Knight a vision of the New Jerusalem says the following of Gloriana and her capitol city: "And well beseemes all knights of noble name, / That couet in th'immortal booke of fame /

To be eternized, that same to haunt, / and doen their service to that soueraigne Dame" (Spenser 1.10.59). For Elizabeth, the English population's acceptance of her as God's representative would also help to provide her with the authority to pursue her goals in the religious settlement. By associating her representation, Gloriana, with such authority given by God, Spenser encouraged the perception of Elizabeth as a divinely appointed sovereign whose right to rule should not be questioned.

Spenser's depiction of Gloriana, if she truly represents Elizabeth, should reflect descriptions of Elizabeth common during her reign. In speaking of Gloriana, Guyon's commentary to Medina and her sisters asserts that "in widest Ocean she her throne does reare" (Spenser 2.2.40). This statement suggests the very setting of England, the island kingdom in the Atlantic Ocean where Elizabeth reigned as queen. Furthermore, Guyon's description of Gloriana as a great and glorious virgin queen who sustains peace in her land mirrors Elizabeth's pursuit of a peaceful religious settlement after years of conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Elizabeth's use of Tudor iconography about the book urged a compromise through the guidance provided in the Bible and endorsed the Protestant idea of justification by faith alone. Additionally, Guyon glorifies his sovereign in highly complimentary terms that focus on her rare virtue and magnificence:

In her the riches of all heavenly grace,  
 In chiefe degree are heaped up on hye:  
 And all that else this worlds enclosure bace,

Hath great or glorious in mortall eye,  
 Adornes the person of her Maiestie;  
 That men beholding so great excellence,  
 And rare perfection in mortalitie,  
 Do her adore with sacred reuerence,  
 As th'Idole of her makers great magnificence. (Spenser 2.2.41)

The whole speech by Guyon echoes how English courtiers of Spenser's time spoke of Elizabeth. In Ambition and Privilege: Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory, Frank Whigham describes techniques courtiers used such as strategic awareness of the audience's status and performances that display class affiliation (46). Parliament's speeches (1559) urging Elizabeth to marry praised the good of her reign and her own character while declaring their desire to secure the benefits of Elizabeth's reign for future generations (Camden 25-26). Also, as discussed in the text and endnotes of Chapter One, poetry created by Elizabeth's courtiers and subjects—including Philip Sidney; George Peele; Richard Barnfield; John Lyly; George Champion; Sir Walter Raleigh; Robert, Earl of Essex; Ben Jonson; and Sir John Davies—praised her in a manner befitting a lover's address to his mistress.<sup>3</sup> They spoke of her beauty and virtue and asserted their passionate attachment to her as her loyal servants. Because everyone around Elizabeth knew that the queen was the source of power, they competed for her favor. Writers and artists seeking the privileges Elizabeth could provide would avoid any representation that might offend the queen. Anyone who hoped to gain from her generosity endeavored to avoid angering Elizabeth. More

importantly, they competed to prove their love and loyalty to the queen—a competition Elizabeth enjoyed but needed to control.

While Spenser depicted Gloriana sending her knights on quests, Elizabeth had to discover other ways to control the competition among her ambitious courtiers. Rhetoric and political activity allowed opportunities for her courtiers to further their hopes for power and prestige, but Elizabeth did not entirely rely on such political activity to channel the aspirations of her courtiers. Although Elizabeth did not send her courtiers on quests such as those achieved by Gloriana's knights, Elizabeth did dispatch men to fight for her when she deemed it necessary. Fighting the Spanish Armada provided one such opportunity, and Elizabeth's Tilbury camp speech, which sought to bolster her troops' resolve as an invasion by Spain was anticipated, made her pride in the troops as clear as her own resolve (Fraser 210).<sup>4</sup> She also sent Sir Walter Raleigh "on a voyage of western discovery in March, 1583" (Oakeshott 24). The most important similarity between the situations of the two queens and their courtiers is that, whether they were serving Gloriana or Elizabeth, the "knights" hoped to earn their sovereign lady's favor.

Thomas H. Cain acknowledges that her public image recommended an interpretation of Elizabeth as a savior of the Protestant cause when he declares that "Spenser touches on the popular Protestant concept of Elizabeth as God's chosen vessel" (16). More accurately, Spenser utilized Protestant concepts, like the idea of the Bible as a means of religious instruction, that Elizabeth adopted in her approach to religion. Spenser's depictions of the Bible in his text supported

Elizabeth's efforts to advocate bible study. By urging people to read and study the Bible, Elizabeth upheld the ideal of trusting individual judgement rooted in the Bible's text. Through her efforts, the Bible regained importance as a religious tool of religious education needed by all people not just clergy. This assertion of the Bible's value received support through Spenser's two depictions of the Bible in the adventure of the Redcrosse Knight. First, the Redcrosse Knight gives Prince Arthur a Bible to seal their friendship: "which to requite, the Redcrosse Knight him gaue \ A booke wherein his Saueours testament \ was writ with golden letters rich and brave" (Spenser 1.9.19). This book is clearly valuable in material terms; but, a Protestant believer who recognized it as the Bible would probably have noted its religious value as a tool of religious self-education. Later, the character of Fidelia carries a book "that was both signed and seald with blood, \ wherein dark things were writ, hard to be understood"—clearly intended as a Bible—and uses it to teach the Redcrosse Knight theology (Spenser 1.10. 15). Fidelia teaches Redcrosse to interpret the meaning so he can read and understand it for himself. Spenser's application of Elizabeth's vision of the Bible as a valuable spiritual guide played an important role in his effort to characterize her as a Protestant heroine. The Bible, for Elizabeth, represented the truth of God's word, and she encouraged her subjects to study the Bible as a means of directing their faith. Endorsement of her approach to bible study, which Spenser provided through his depiction of the Bible in The Faerie Queene, also supported Elizabeth as a representative of God's will on Earth.

Sovereign authority provided Elizabeth with the rights of a king, but, as discussed in Chapter One, public support cemented her control.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the unmarried Gloriana maintained sole authority in her realm and made use of it to help her people. For example, both chose to provide occasions to hear requests from their subjects. Elizabeth elected to make contact with her subjects by way of her court's progresses. Gloriana's court maintained an annual feast where Gloriana heard any requests for aid people might bring to her.<sup>6</sup> Spenser describes the circumstances initiating the events of The Faerie Queene in the following words from his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh:

The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by a Historiographer should be the twelfth booke, which is the last, where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii. dayes, upon which xii. seureall dayes, the occassions of the xii. seuerall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by xii seuerall knights are in these xii books seuerally handled and discoursed.  
(Spenser 17)

The adventures of The Faerie Queene, therefore, began, according to Spenser, at the annual feast at Gloriana's court. As that feast progressed, Gloriana sent a knight in response to any requests from her subjects. As supplicants came seeking her help, she selected a knight to assist. The arrivals of Una and the Palmer provide two such instances of Gloriana sending a knight to answer a request for aid. When Una came seeking assistance in freeing her parents' kingdom from a dragon, the Redcrosse Knight gladly accepted the challenge and



went to her aid. Similarly, Guyon departed with the Palmer to seek the Bower of Bliss in order to capture Acrasia and bring her to Gloriana's court for judgement. Like Elizabeth, Gloriana sought to oblige the requests of her people whenever it was feasible; nevertheless, Gloriana's realm is a different "literary world" created by Edmund Spenser.

Spenser's depiction of fairyland included supernatural elements such as magic and sorcery—in the form of Archimago—and mythical beasts like the dragon Redcrosse must face. There are various god-like beings present—most drawn from Greek or Roman myth. Spenser used the names of Pluto, Diana, Venus, Hesperus, Poseidon, Morpheus and Bacchus as well as a long list of other well-known mythical characters that includes Tantalus, Aescalapyus, and Hippolytus. In Canto I of Book I, Archimago summons the help of Morpheus in his scheme against Redcrosse and Una while Duessa travels to Hades in Canto V to seek the aid of Aescalapyus in saving Sans Joy. There are also notable acknowledgements of English folklore and legend. The inclusion of characters like Prince Arthur and the Redcrosse Knight represent a reminder of English legend and history. Prince Arthur's place as a representation of the legendary King Arthur was acknowledged in Spenser's letter to Raleigh. The Redcrosse Knight's story is reminiscent of St. George, patron saint of England, and the dragon he fought. The character of Merlin, who advises Britomart in Book III, certainly acts like the seer who helped King Arthur. All of the reminders of magic, myth, and English legend helped build the image of fairyland that Spenser created.

In developing A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, William Shakespeare borrowed the sense of myth and the supernatural inherent in Spenser's vision of fairy land and usurped "the lodestone metaphor, the 'fairy queen,' " (Reid 19). His depiction of the fairy queen in his A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, however, developed very differently from Spenser's vision of Gloriana as a representative of God and a mirror of Elizabeth by utilizing the sensual nature of the world his fairy queen rules. While Spenser's Gloriana represented the regal and virginal sides of Elizabeth, William Shakespeare depicted Titania, a very different fairy queen who possessed a husband, Oberon, and a passionate nature. Statements in Robert L Reid's "The Fairy Queen: Gloriana or Titania" assert that Titania's name connects her to the night and earthly values. Reid affirms that "the epithet *[T]itania* embraces 'in one comprehensive symbol the whole female empire of mystery and night belonging to mythology' " with "rich and complex associations connected with the silver bow of Diana, the magic cup of Circe, and the triple crown of Hecate" (21).<sup>7</sup> Reid asserts that "Shakespeare's Titania exults in the sensuous, mutable realities of an earthly moonlit forest" (21). Titania's bower, for example, is nestled next to a tree where she can enjoy the sounds of the world around her. Oberon describes the location of Titania's bower in the following words: "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, / and the nodding violet grows, / Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine, / With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine" (Shakespeare 2.1.249-252). This resting-place allows Titania to delight in contact with the natural world. The inclusion of "Titan" as a portion of her name also signifies "the earthly values and moral dubiety of Shakespeare's

fairy monarchs: spirit power combined with titanic pride" (Reid 21).

Shakespeare's characterization of Titania could have offended the virgin queen if she were associated with Titania; however, Shakespeare made every effort to reduce the possibility of offending Elizabeth by avoiding any direct correlation between Elizabeth and Titania in the play's text.

Though the married Titania should not be seen as exemplifying Elizabeth, an examination of Titania's relationship with Oberon illuminates the reasons why her people feared the possibility of Elizabeth's marrying. The most serious element of the disagreement between Titania and Oberon consists of the intensity of female opposition to male authority. Her attachment to the late Votaress incites Titania to oppose the will of her husband. In response, Oberon manipulates Titania's passion by causing her to fall in love with a simple Athenian workman, Bottom.<sup>8</sup> He commands his servant, Puck, to retrieve a flower capable of spawning love and plots that "with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes, \ And make her full of hateful fantasies" (Shakespeare 2.1.257-258). Oberon hopes to use the flower's effect on Titania to help him gain the changeling boy; indeed, he vows not to remove the charm without getting Titania to "render up her page to me" (Shakespeare 2.1.185).

A love spell might not supply a means of manipulating Elizabeth, as the charmed flower permitted Oberon to influence Titania, but patriarchal ideas suggested that a husband would have the privilege of authority over his wife's decisions. A potential suitor might have treated Elizabeth well while courting her, but marriage would have altered Elizabeth's position since she would have

become a wife rather than a mistress. Elaine Hobby expresses this point in Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-88: "Women were under no illusion that, however much they might care for their husbands, once they were married their relationship would change from the courtship pattern of 'mistress' and 'servant' to man and wife" (4). In keeping with this perspective, Diana E. Henderson observes that courtship allowed women some power over their suitors, who acted as their lady's loyal servant, but marriage "shifts the emphasis within the romance to a woman's lack, her sense of inadequacy or dissatisfaction" (230). Oberon's actions toward Titania suggested what might happen if Elizabeth married, especially if her husband sought to interfere with her decisions about religion and other issues important to the lives of her subjects. Titania, in reflecting upon her quarrel with Oberon, insists his actions have sought to interfere with her choices. Titania reminds him that "never, since the middle of summer's spring," have she and her followers gathered to pay tribute to "the whistling wind" without Oberon disrupting their meeting with his brawling (Shakespeare 2.1.82-87). This commentary demonstrates how the conflict between Titania and Oberon, at least from her perspective, issues from his attempts to control her actions. Oberon refuses to give any heed to Titania's wishes and interferes with her and her followers as they seek to perform their chosen rituals. This treatment of her and her followers only exacerbates the situation by magnifying Titania's perception of Oberon as attempting to control her actions—just as he is trying to force her to give him the Votaress's son who is serving as Titania's page. As Helen Hackett notes, Titania's commentary reflects

on the state of fairy land and a perceived disorder in its body politic (25).

Because of Oberon and Titania's disagreement, Titania declares that turmoil reigns across the land and their subjects are suffering. The conflict between male and female rulers must be resolved in order to end the turmoil.

The possibility that Elizabeth's consort might not be Protestant increased her Protestant subjects' fears about the future of England's church; a Catholic consort might have interfered with the Protestant church and Elizabeth's choices about the religious settlement just as Oberon interferes with Titania and her followers.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, when suitors sought Elizabeth's hand, she and her privy council were careful to question the suitor's religious opinions. Elizabeth's Protestant subjects, especially those who remembered the purges of Mary's reign, feared that a Catholic consort would influence Elizabeth and threaten their religious freedom. This fact becomes evident in Susan Doran's comment that "the greatest objection of all to the Austrian and French candidates, however, was their Catholicism" (46-47); yet, Elizabeth's court hoped a potential husband might prove moderate in his feelings about religion. Elizabeth's advisors wished to do what was best for the people of England, and a consort who posed little risk to the delicate balance of religious tolerance was deemed best for both the people of England and Elizabeth (1558-1582). Although her subjects worried about the men around Elizabeth manipulating her, Elizabeth, who gave up a courtship with the Duke of Alencon due to concerns regarding his Catholicism (1579), was unlikely to permit her emotions to sway her intellect when considering what was best for England's population.

The people of England feared the possibility of a husband influencing Elizabeth's decisions; however, the reconciliation of Oberon and Titania suggested a marriage could work if Elizabeth and her consort treated each other as equals and companions rather than adhering to the traditional patriarchal pattern of a husband obtaining authority over his wife. In A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, an opportunity for a companionable marriage seems to be emerging between Oberon and Titania. After seeing her with Bottom, Oberon admits to Puck "[h]er dotage now I begin to pity" (Shakespeare 4.1.47). He removes the enchantment before declaring "[n]ow, my Titania, wake you, my sweet queen" (Shakespeare 4.1.75). Oberon and Titania find themselves "new in amity" and agree to bless the upcoming weddings in Athens together (Shakespeare 4.1.85-90). They honor that pledge by amicably leading their fairy subjects in dancing and wishing for the couples now married to "ever true in loving be" (Shakespeare 5.1.391-422). Although Shakespeare provided no specific indication of this meaning, his depiction of Titania's marriage to Oberon may have been intended to urge Elizabeth to choose a consort who would trust her judgement and not interfere with England's government.

Clearly, Elizabeth would find Gloriana a more acceptable representation than she would Titania since Titania possessed a passionate personality that would force Elizabeth to confront her own feminine nature if she associated herself with Titania. William Shakespeare, however, did not specifically declare any character in A Mid-Summer Night's Dream to represent Elizabeth; in fact, as Robert L. Reid notes, the only true allusion to Elizabeth present in Shakespeare's

A Mid-Summer Night's Dream consists of Oberon's recollection of the time he saw Cupid fail to hit "a fair vestal, throned by the west" (19). This flattering description suited Elizabeth, the virginal ruler of a western kingdom; yet, it also served a specific purpose since the praise Shakespeare heaped on this fair vestal functioned to divert Elizabeth "from identifying with the fairy queen" thereby avoiding her displeasure (Reid 19). As will be further discussed in Chapter Five, Shakespeare maintains his creative privilege by diverting Elizabeth's attention from any connection with Titania.

However, though not intended as a mirror, Titania, as depicted by Shakespeare, possessed some characteristics in common with Elizabeth. Both enjoyed dancing and music as a part of their court activity, and each had courtiers about them to dispatch on whatever task they wished. Titania's fairies serve as her courtiers, and they are careful to fulfill her wishes including killing "cankers in the musk-rose buds, " warring "with the rere-mice for their leathren wings \ To make my small elves coats, " and keeping "back \ The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots and wonders \ At our quaint spirits" (Shakespeare 2.2.1-8). Beyond their obedience to her wishes resides a hint of her fairies' concern for Titania's welfare which first becomes evident in the following quote: "You spotted snakes with double tongue, \ Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen, \ Newts and blindworms, do no wrong, \ Come not near our fairy queen" (Shakespeare 2.2.9-12). Like Titania's followers in A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, Elizabeth's courtiers behaved with dutiful respect and obedience toward their sovereign. Joseph M. Levine observes of Elizabeth that "by transforming her courtiers into

knights and herself into their lady, she could demand their service, their devotion, even their humility, without embarrassing them" (57). Courtly love patterns allowed Elizabeth to enjoy the pleasures of courtship while also granting her the services of her male courtiers. Elizabeth's courtiers, as her "knights, " treated her as a lady since they knew Elizabeth controlled their destiny.

Most importantly, like Elizabeth, Titania's main sentiment is for the people she loves. She passionately opposes her husband, Oberon, over a little changeling boy for the sake of the boy's mother, a dear friend and follower who is now deceased. In a confrontation with Oberon, Titania explains her love for the mother by telling Oberon: "Set your heart at rest; \ The fairy land buys not the child of me. \ His mother was a vot'ress of my order, \ And in the spiced Indian air, by night, \ Full often hath she gossip'd by my side" (Shakespeare 2.1.122-125). Titania tells Oberon, in the following words, that her resistance to his request for the boy is not out of spite but rises out of her attachment to the changeling boy's mother: "But she, being mortal, of that boy did die, \ And for her sake do I rear up her boy; \ And for her sake I will not part with him" (Shakespeare 2.1.135-137). In making this speech, she makes it readily apparent that he won't acquire the child at any price since her possession of the boy helps Titania retain a link to the late votaress. Helen Hackett, in analyzing the nature of the quarrel between Titania and Oberon, suggests: "[t]he most serious challenge to male authority in the play, the only truly equivalent force, is the uncontained fertile female sexuality represented by the Indian votaress, by Titania's league with her and intense Maternal affection for her son" (29). For



love of the mother and her son, Titania strives to prevent Oberon from taking the boy away from her.

Even as Titania clearly favored the votaress, Elizabeth had her followers that she valued. She honored such favorites with gifts of various kinds including land and titles; indeed, Frank Whigham's Ambition & Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory offers a discussion of the presents exchanged by Elizabeth and her courtiers (68-71). Still, although her wealthy courtiers had the financial power to serve her and provide expensive presents and entertainments, Elizabeth seems to have never forgotten that all of the people of England were her subjects and their welfare was her sacred charge. When she reluctantly considered suitors, Elizabeth was careful to refuse those who would not benefit her people for financial, political, or religious reasons.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, her first consideration, as she told Parliament in 1559, was that a potential husband be as concerned for the welfare of the people of England as she was (Camden 23). Accepting a husband who would attempt to take her authority away from her struck Elizabeth as unjust to her people as well as unfair to herself. Essentially, if Titania was associated with Elizabeth because of their positions as queens, the changeling boy could be interpreted as the future of England. Elizabeth avoided letting other people force her to marry against her own will; therefore, she maintained rights to shaping England's future.

Although they were produced by two different authors, the two depictions of fairy queens do possess certain aspects in common with each other as well as with Elizabeth. Spenser's Gloriana and Shakespeare's Titania both possess a

mystical quality connecting them to the spiritual realm. Gloriana can be seen as a connection between Earth and God, while Titania is associated with magical creatures and the pleasures of Earth's natural world. Like Elizabeth, both fairy queens appear to have the love and respect of the subjects who serve them. Their courtiers willingly serve Gloriana and Titania and speak only good things about them. The connections between Gloriana, Titania, and Elizabeth reflect the regal character of each. Gloriana's mystical connection to God echoes the idea of the divine right of kings, which Elizabeth used in her effort to secure her reign. Elizabeth also enjoyed seeing her subjects and used progresses and other gatherings to hear what they had to say much like Gloriana does with her annual feast and Titania perhaps does during gatherings for fairy rituals. As rulers, Elizabeth and the characters of Spenser's Gloriana and Shakespeare's Titania had to maintain a connection with their subjects while maintaining their authority.

With little evidence to suggest how Elizabeth reacted to the works of Spenser and Shakespeare, it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty whether she would have favored one of their fairy queens over the other's representation; however, evidence of her concerns in creating her public image, especially her desire to be seen as perpetually young and beautiful, confirms the assertion that she would welcome a perception of her as a fairy queen, an image that suggested a mystical connection to the world around her and an agelessness that would appeal to her. Both works appeared in the later years of her reign when Elizabeth was most concerned with avoiding thoughts of her own

mortality.<sup>11</sup> Associating herself with the ageless image of a fairy queen gave Elizabeth an opportunity to avoid her own mortality. She also still needed to depict her strength as a ruler. That need created a different representational dilemma for authors—woman warrior or Amazon.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Many critics, including Isabel Rathborne (218) and Jeffrey Paul Fruen ("The Fairy Queen unveiled" 60-61), cite Gloriana as a symbol of majestic beauty manifesting virtues. The virtues that Spenser seems to have particularly wished to use as connections between Elizabeth and Gloriana are wisdom, chastity, and glory.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary by Guyon partially acknowledges this version of events (Spenser 2.2.43.1-5).

<sup>3</sup> See M.C. Bradbrook's The Queen's Garland: Verses made by Her Subjects For Elizabeth I, Queen of England now collected In Honour of her majesty Queen Elizabeth II for specific examples from these authors.

<sup>4</sup> This element of Elizabeth's speech is also mentioned in Green's discourse on the Tilbury Oration (421).

<sup>5</sup> See pages 26 & 28 in Chapter One for the discussion of Elizabeth's need for public support.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of the court feast day can be traced back in English literature to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and other Arthurian oriented texts, like Geoffrey of Monmouth's The History of The Kings and Queens of England, which depict such feasts during Arthur's reign.

<sup>7</sup> Diana is the Roman name of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt. Artemis, "the Goddess with three forms," was called Hecate in the Greek underworld of Hades where she represented the darkness of the moon (Hamilton 31-32). Circe, a sorceress best known from Homer's The Odyssey, was a beautiful but

dangerous witch who transformed men into beasts (Hamilton 211-212). The significance of the association between these mythic characters and Titania will be further explored in Chapter Five.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting here that I initially thought Titania's relationship with Bottom could be a representation of the romance with the Duke of Alencon, but the date of 1582, when Alencon departed England for good (King "Queen Elizabeth I" 58), seems a bit early to connect it with the first performance of A Mid-Summer Night's Dream in 1600 (Shakespeare 252).

<sup>9</sup> Remembering Philip of Spain's relationship with Mary, Elizabeth's sister, further illuminates the reasons for this fear. Mary's marriage to Philip, who was denied any power in England during their marriage, was considered a source of her reign's severe stance on Catholicism. Antonia Fraser observes that Mary believed the troubles in her marriage were God's punishment for England's break from the Catholic Church (200). Her effort to eradicate Protestantism in England was, to her, a fight against sin and heresy to save England's population from God's wrath. After Mary's death, Philip attempted to woo Elizabeth; however, Elizabeth refused to make the same mistake her sister had made by marrying the unpopular foreign prince, a staunch Catholic (Levin "The Heart and Stomach" 8). Later, Elizabeth's near engagement to the French Duke of Alencon received criticism because of his Catholicism, though her council expressed the opinion that he might convert to Protestantism (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 62 or Doran 46-47).

<sup>10</sup> Carole Levin provides a fairly thorough examination of Elizabeth's courtships, especially with Archduke Charles and the French Duke of Alencon, in Chapter Three of "The Heart and Stomach of a King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power. Elizabeth was generally very careful to have reasons for breaking off a courtship, especially those involving foreign princes. She broke off some courtships—for instance with the Archduke Charles and the Duke of Anjou—because the suitor was a Catholic and did not seem likely to tolerate her approach to religion (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 51 & 55). Some suitors, like Eric of Sweden, seemed unfavorable because the nation involved did not possess the power to be of assistance—financially, politically or militarily—to England (Doran 42-43). Levin states it best when she observes that "Elizabeth, whatever her emotions, kept them sufficiently under control as not to" agree to a marriage that her subjects would not support ("Heart and Stomach" 45).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth reigned from 1558 to 1603. Edmund Spenser published the first three books of The Faerie Queene in 1590 with the rest appearing in 1596. Records indicate that William Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream was first printed, in Quarto edition, in 1600 (Shakespeare 252).

### Chapter Three

#### Amazon or Woman Warrior: Britomart, Hippolyta, and Elizabeth

Their mutual use of fairy queens reveals an intertextual link between Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene and William Shakespeare's A Mid-Summer Night's Dream. The characters of Spenser's Britomart and Shakespeare's Hippolyta, on the other hand, constitute a contrast that inspires questions about Elizabeth's representational preferences. Authors and artists seeking Elizabeth's favor needed to recognize how she would want to be presented. As a female sovereign, Elizabeth could potentially be depicted as a warrior woman or an Amazon queen. Elizabeth's public image, which emphasized a combination of feminine virtue and sovereign strength, made it likely that she would have approved of a connection between herself and Spenser's Britomart, a warrior woman who accepted a destiny that made her an ancestress of Elizabeth's line, rather than association with the undesirable image of Amazons present in records of the era.

Julia Walker asserts that in Spenser's The Faerie Queene Elizabeth can be more closely associated with the character of Britomart than with Gloriana and Belphebe, the representations Spenser acknowledged: "[n]either the perpetually deferred Gloriana nor the fatherless Belphebe with her twin sister Amoret offers as accurate a reflection of Elizabeth as does Britomart, the heir of her father's kingdom and a figure of female power" ("Spenser's Elizabeth Portrait" 176). Britomart and Elizabeth are both women who take the leading role and reign as their kingdom's sovereign. As Knight of Chastity and heir to her father's

kingdom, Britomart joins the power of sovereignty with the virtue of chastity. Britomart combines the virginity that Spenser reflects in Belpheobe, Una, and Medina with the sovereign power represented by Gloriana and Mercilla. Britomart connects the qualities Spenser represented in attempting to depict Elizabeth and provides the tie to destiny that supported Elizabeth's position as the divinely appointed ruler of England.

Both Britomart and Elizabeth are women who take the leading role and reign as their kingdom's chief lady. Destiny and their similar positions as demonstrations of the capability of women connect the character, Britomart, and the real life queen, Elizabeth I. In " 'she there as Princess rained': Spenser's Figure of Elizabeth," Mary R. Bowman makes the following comments about the connection between Elizabeth and Spenser's Britomart:

Associating Britomart with Elizabeth is a possibility throughout *The Faerie Queene*; as the figure of Chastity, she inevitably suggest the Virgin Queen, and in the fiction of the poem she is an ancestor of Elizabeth and, like Elizabeth, heir to her father's British kingdom.

(519)

As Bowman's comment assists in clarifying, Elizabeth and Britomart are linked by Britomart's destiny to become a mother and produce the royal line that leads to Elizabeth's reign. A dream vision that Britomart has in the Temple of Isis depicts Britomart as a priestess of Isis, whose role as Osiris's wife makes her signify "[t]hat part of iustice which is equity" (Spenser 5.7.3). Britomart is transformed into a queen in a "robe of scarlet red" (Spenser 5.7.13). A union with a crocodile



produces "a Lion of great might" (Spenser 5.7.16). After Britomart awakens and tells about the dream, a priest of Isis interprets the crocodile as Artegall "[l]ike to *Osyris* in all iust endeuer. / For that same crocodile *Osyris* is, / that under *Isis* feete doth sleepe for euer" (Spenser 5.7.22). The lion represents the son Britomart and Artegall will have, who "[l]ion-like shall shew his powre extreame" (Spenser 5.7.22-23). The dream signifies "a marriage between justice and equity which will result in a strong nation" (Wells 123). The nation was England, and Elizabeth ultimately provided that strength through her effort to unite the people of England.

Edmund Spenser's illustration of Britomart's story connects her to destiny and prophecy. Daryl Gless, in Interpretation and Theology in Spenser, intimates that this prophecy serves "to present Britomart's love and its eventual result, Elizabeth's dynasty, as products of benevolent divine planning" (194). Spenser, through this connection of Elizabeth and Britomart, endeavored to depict Elizabeth as the chosen mediator of the religious divisions in England. The religious settlement and reunion of her divided subjects was a mission that Elizabeth took to heart (Fraser 202); however, her position of authority was not unchallenged by patriarchal concerns about women's right to rule. Mary R. Bowman makes this fact apparent in observing that a debate "raged during the sixteenth century over the validity of rule by women" which denounced all but those women rulers who were "divinely appointed" (518). When Elizabeth ascended the throne of England, Mary I's reign, which cost the lives of many Protestants, had just ended. Elizabeth needed to portray herself in a different

light to alleviate the population's worries about further religious upheaval, and the character of Spenser's Britomart would have served Elizabeth's need. Britomart would have iconographically justified Elizabeth's presence on England's throne by affirming that God selected Elizabeth to rule England. Spenser's allegorical association of Britomart and Elizabeth through prophecy suggests that, even as it was Britomart's destiny to marry Artegall and become a mother, Elizabeth's reign was predestined by God to provide a means of resolving the issues dividing the people of England. Elizabeth's survival through the turbulent reigns of Edward VI and Mary I probably indicated to some people that she was intended to survive so that she could ascend to the English throne and end the turmoil.<sup>1</sup> Britomart's depiction as the royal virgin destined to rule her own kingdom would have supported Elizabeth's privileges as England's sovereign by granting her the position of a divinely appointed woman ruler.

The correlation between Britomart and Elizabeth permits consideration of an allegory which "through Britomart's struggles with various manifestations of fleshy force—undertakes to depict the sexual as well as the political implications of Elizabeth's evolving transformation from queen and virgin to Virgin Queen" (Walker "Spenser's Elizabeth Portrait" 176). Britomart's portrayal as the Knight of Chastity in Spenser's The Faerie Queene depicts her as a warrior woman with the strength and ability to go into the world to seek her intended husband, Artegall. She confronts several opponents including the Lady of Delight and her followers, Marinell, Braggadachio, Ollyphant, Paridell, the Amazon Queen named Radigund, and Artegall himself. Her opponents offer temptations that threaten

Britomart's femininity and chastity. For instance, the knights at the Lady of Delight's court represent various elements of lecherous behavior: looking, speaking, joking, kissing, and reveling (Spenser 1142). Britomart, however, does not give in to the temptations offered by such activity as she pursues her goal of finding Artegall. Such temptations remind Britomart that she is a woman, but that fact does not cause her to consider "anything inherently wrong in her own knightly activities, in her defeats of male knights, or in her expectation of rule" (Bowman 510-511). Her knightly activities show that Britomart can manage on her own in spite of the difficulties she faces. In many ways, Britomart's ability to handle her own problems maintains the connection between Britomart and Elizabeth. It is in the issue of marriage that they differ. Elizabeth ascended the throne as a virgin queen, but public opinion encouraged her to become a married queen. Britomart's struggles served to allegorically illustrate Elizabeth's difficulties in maintaining her status as the virginal queen while also showing the strength it took to overcome those obstacles. Elizabeth faced patriarchal opposition and her court's fervent requests that she marry. Her subjects begged for an end to the uncertainty about the succession, and suitors, including foreign princes like Philip of Spain, sought her hand in marriage. Elizabeth carefully resisted efforts to have her marry, especially if the potential suitor would not be an asset to the people of her domain.

Elizabeth never married though she assured her court that she would marry if God's will deemed it right for her to do so (Camden 27). On the other

hand, Britomart, as Spenser described her, anticipated a future that unquestionably included marriage and pondered who she might marry:

So thought this Mayd (as maydens vse to done)

Whom fortune for her husband would allot,

Not that she lusted after any one;

For she was pure from blame of sinfull blot,

Yet wist her life at last must lincke in that same knot. (3.2.23.5-9)

A magic mirror showed her Artegall, the man she was destined to marry, and Britomart instantly fell in love with him. Lovesick, she accepted the advice of her maid and visited the magician known as Merlin to discover how to locate the man she saw in the mirror. Merlin identified Artegall and prophesied about the line of descendants the union of Britomart and Artegall would produce—ending with a royal virgin: "Then shall a royall virgin raine, which shall / Stretch her white rod ouer the *Belgicke* shore, / And the great Castle smite so sore with all, / That it shall make him shake, and shortly learne to fall" (Spenser 3.3.49.6-9). This prophecy clearly suggests Elizabeth, a royal virgin who led England to victory against the Spanish armada.<sup>2</sup> The virgin of Merlin's prophecy brings respect and prosperity to her kingdom just as Elizabeth did after she gained the throne of England. It is a destined line of descent that begins when, after the visit with Merlin, Britomart, urged on by her maid, follows his advice to seek out her love. She obtains armor from a display of her father's trophies and sets out in search of her future husband, Artegall. In seeking Artegall, Britomart demonstrates her ability to confidently handle the men around her as well as her love for Artegall.

That love ensures Britomart's destiny as a mother and paves the way for Elizabeth.

Even as Spenser's Britomart will eventually leave the battlefield behind when she and Artegall start their family, William Shakespeare's Hippolyta, as depicted in A Mid-Summer Night's Dream is preparing to settle into life as Theseus' wife.<sup>3</sup> Although a woman, Hippolyta's life as an Amazon queen had given her a lot of experience in battle. During a hunt with Theseus, Hippolyta recalls being with Hercules and Cadmus on a hunt "[w]hen, in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear / With hounds of Sparta" (Shakespeare 4.1.112-114). She remembers it as a wonderful experience when "[n]ever did I hear / Such gallant chiding" (Shakespeare 114-115). Although she has fond memories of hunting, it was in combat that Hippolyta met Theseus, who remembers how he won her love during battle: "I woo'd thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries" (Shakespeare 1.1.16-17). He promises her that their marriage will be different: "But I will wed thee in another key, / With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling" (Shakespeare 1.1.18-19). With their courtship over, Theseus anticipates happiness and a long life with Hippolyta after their wedding. This optimism seems unusual if a scholar examines the characterization of Amazons in Elizabethan tales about those warrior women as Mary Villeponteux did.

In Elizabethan times, Amazons possessed an unsavory reputation as threatening to men, unfeminine, and non-maternal. Villeponteux, in "'not as women wonted be': Spenser's Amazon Queen," observes that Amazons were popularly believed to pervert nature "by cutting off their breasts, committing

infanticide, and the like" (212). They were reputed to seek out men only for the purpose of breeding (Villeponteaux 214). According to the stories told about them, the only children Amazons kept were their daughters, but reports of the cruel treatment of those daughters gained their mothers a reputation for an unmotherly character especially William Painter's assertion that "they seared up the right breasts of their yonge daughters" (qtd. in Villeponteaux 214).<sup>4</sup> The only characteristics deemed positive about Amazon women were their courage and strength (Villeponteaux 213). Elizabeth might have appreciated these characteristics being associated with her, but she would have deemed it slanderous to suggest she shared the Amazons' predatory nature.

The cruel and overly masculine character these tales gave Amazons would not have suited the needs of Elizabeth, who styled herself as a mother to her people.<sup>5</sup> The character of Hippolyta, however, receives different treatment in Shakespeare's depiction of her for A Mid-Summer Night's Dream.

Shakespeare's positive presentation of his Amazon queen fits the typical restraint of the period in presenting Amazons on stage. Villeponteaux acknowledges this difference between the descriptions of Amazons in stories and their portrayal on stage during Elizabeth's reign when she states that as "popular figures in Elizabethan drama, Amazons were almost always portrayed positively on stage, possibly because they potentially alluded to the queen" (213). Hippolyta appears decidedly non-threatening and looks forward to her upcoming marriage. Though an Amazon, Hippolyta speaks with love for Theseus, the man she will soon marry, in noting that there is little time left to wait before "the night / of our

solemnities" (Shakespeare, 1.1.10-11). Hippolyta's characterization edges more toward an ordinary woman in love rather than an Amazon. Nevertheless, it seems likely that identifying Hippolyta as "Queen of the Amazons" could have made Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience think of the unflattering perception of Amazons Villeponteaux details in "'not as women wonted be': Spenser's Amazon Queen". However, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five, the softening of Hippolyta's image may have helped to assert that Elizabeth's reign was a new order.<sup>6</sup>

Although Elizabeth's subjects did compare her to an Amazon (Villeponteaux 212), there were good reasons for Elizabeth to prefer an image as a woman warrior, like Britomart, as opposed to a presentation as an Amazon like Hippolyta. Connecting Elizabeth to the Amazons' monstrous reputation as threatening and unmaternal would have clashed with her public image as a caring mother to her people. Indeed, as Bowman acknowledges, a major reason for "opposition to the Amazon figure is to allay the fears invited in men by a powerful woman" (521):

Figuring herself in *opposition* to the sexually predatory Amazon served in part to insulate Elizabeth against disloyalty born of fear by diffusing the anxiety her peculiar situation necessarily bred, suggesting that *this* powerful woman was somehow different from the ones that really presented a threat to men. (522)

Mary Bowman asserts that "[Elizabeth] is an independent and powerful ruler, but she chooses to project an image not violent but loving, not sexually predatory but

celestial and virginal" (521). By cultivating an image that opposed the Amazons' predatory character, Elizabeth strove to reassure the men around her that her version of female sovereignty was of a different order from previous female rulers like Mary I of England or Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth represented a Protestant Amazon or warrior woman while "Bloody Mary" Tudor and the passionate Mary Stuart were both Catholic Amazons. Furthermore, Elizabeth's position required her to soothe the fears of men who, due to patriarchal ideology, could not conceive of a female ruler as being capable without being unwomanly and may have seen her as a threat because of her power as sovereign.

Elizabeth realized that her courtiers would find serving a female ruler difficult and sought to avoid earning their distrust. Mary Villeponteaux illuminates the fact that Elizabeth's active pursuit of her people's welfare was appropriate to a ruler, but such a pursuit conflicted with the expected character of women as quiet and submissive: "Feminine virtue normally means chastity alone for Elizabethans, an essentially passive attribute threatened by vigor and activity, as the many exhortations to women to stay home and stay quiet would suggest" (217).

Although Elizabeth certainly promoted the virtues of chastity, she considered a womanly image inappropriate for a queen (Levin "The Heart and Stomach" 12). Nevertheless, an Amazonian image could only have made her male subjects and courtiers feel endangered by Elizabeth; therefore, a less threatening image, like that of Spenser's Britomart, would have proved of greater assistance in dealing with the men around her.



Spenser's characterization of Britomart provided a woman warrior image suited to the purpose of easing male fears about Elizabeth's power. A warrior woman like Britomart could be feminine, maternal, and capable without threatening men. In this way, Britomart would have appealed to Elizabeth, who wanted to maintain authority without distancing the men around her by acting in too masculine a manner. Elizabeth's self-depiction placed her in opposition to the sort of female power represented by Mary, Queen of Scots. In Edmund Spenser's allegory, the Amazon queen, Radigund, represented Mary, Queen of Scots, and the fight between Radigund and Britomart depicted the struggle between Mary and Elizabeth: "Reading the battle with Radigund as a psychomachia enables us to see it more generally as embodying the motivational process of Elizabeth's image-making under the influence of Mary's quite different personal 'style' " (Bowman 519). Elizabeth's connection to Britomart, the virtuous female knight, becomes sharply contrasted against Mary as Radigund, the Amazon queen who takes knights as captives and forces them to do as women's work.<sup>7</sup> According to Bowman, Britomart's rejection of Radigund's form of female autonomy shows how "Elizabeth rejected the antagonistic character of Mary's politics and chose a style in marked contrast to it, a style that enabled her relatively peaceful reign" (520). The contrast between Britomart and Radigund, shaped by Spenser's narrative, reflects how Elizabeth rejected a policy that threatened the men around her. Elizabeth recognized that men would not tolerate a female ruler whose power was used as a direct threat to them and

knew that she needed the support of the men around her to succeed in securing her reign and approval of her approach to the religious conflict.

Britomart's actions in rescuing Artegall from Radigund provided a clear example for Elizabeth of how to avoid threatening male authority. Britomart, as her father's only child, is "destined to rule in her home country, and as her father's heir she has been accustomed to as much 'liberty' as any crown prince" (Bowman 510); however, in defeating Radigund, she confronts the fact that, as a woman, unbridled authority potentially threatens her relationship with Artegall. Britomart's dilemma illustrates the fine line between being a capable woman and being unwomanly:

When Britomart comes to rescue Artegall, therefore, she is caught in a dilemma; it has become clear that her powers are, to Artegall, indistinguishable from Radigund's. The beauty that wins his love can also entrap him; the martial force that conquers Radigund to set him free can equally be employed to enslave him. Radigund embodies an aspect of Britomart that now seems threatening to Artegall; how then can she avoid instilling fear in the man she loves, when her very ability to free him threatens him? (Bowman 512)

If Britomart had maintained the sovereign authority she won from Radigund, she could have kept Artegall and the other captive knights enslaved as Radigund had done; instead, Britomart chose to give Artegall the power her victory over Radigund had earned her. Having defeated Radigund, Britomart promptly frees

all of the knights and insists that they "sweare fealty to *Artegall*" (Spenser 5.7.43).

In essence, Britomart changes the hierarchy of the Amazon's society by reasserting male dominance through her deference to *Artegall*; however it is notable that she maintains her own freedom by acting as princess.<sup>8</sup> Julia M. Walker, in " 'she there as Princess rained': Spenser's Figure of Elizabeth", observes the following about the moment when Britomart, having won the crown by defeating Radigund, relinquishes her authority by giving it to *Artegall*:

She is not merely a knight exercising her abilities in the service of a higher authority, as knights frequently do for their sovereigns; she is, rather, effacing her own power. Her authority, won with her own sword, is employed to reinstate a hierarchy that calls female possession of "liberty" usurpation and female "subjection" to men "true lustice". (510)

Britomart reinstates male authority to maintain her relationship with *Artegall*. In reestablishing a patriarchal hierarchy, she avoids developing a disposition that threatens *Artegall*:

By reversing Radigund's social hierarchy Britomart asserts her difference from Radigund in a way that even *Artegall* can recognize; Britomart employs the power gained in her victory at arms ostentatiously in his service, the very paradox of her action emphasizing her submission to him. By this public show of deference she is able to allay the fear her autonomous power calls forth in *Artegall*. (Bowman 512)

Britomart selects this course of action to avoid offending the man she loves.

Elizabeth, too, could not afford to offend the men around her if she hoped to obtain their trust in her reign.

Unlike Britomart, Elizabeth fought with ideas not weapons. This fact is articulated by Juliet Dusinberre when she explains that "Britomart excelled in battle before men deprived women of arms. Elizabeth, the champion of a later age, translates her ancestor's glory into arts and policy" (272). Elizabeth used concepts about the Prince's two bodies and about chastity to help calm her male subjects' uneasiness about her refusal to wed and secure the future of the succession. Elizabeth's desired goal was a religious settlement that would satisfy all of her subjects, and she pursued this objective through her idea of the Bible as a guide to God's truth. Furthermore, in seeking to solidify her control of the realm and a religious settlement that would satisfy England's populace, Elizabeth advocated the divine right of kings, the concept of the Prince's two bodies, and the use of the Bible as a guide for discovering religious truth. Significantly, the list of English achievements during Elizabeth's reign includes the defeat of the Spanish armada and a great revival in art, literature, and theater. Diana E. Henderson remarks upon the Elizabethan-era rejuvenation of theater when she notes that "at the start of Elizabeth Tudor's reign, one would hardly have predicted a great age of English poetry—much less that lyrical poetry would vitalize the theater"(33). Elizabeth, in seeking to manipulate her public image, encouraged an atmosphere of creativity; however, arguably, the most important objective she accomplished was actually maintaining her rule.

Elizabeth's society marked an advance in perceptions of women's capabilities and a reexamination of women's role in society. Elizabeth herself, though she did not attempt to improve women's position directly, helped foster a better image of women in power. Juliet Dusinberre supports this perception through her assertion that "Elizabeth's success as a political ruler perhaps strengthened the convictions of some Humanists about women's capacity for public life" (273). Patriarchal ideas made Elizabeth's existence as a female sovereign a very difficult situation; however, Dusinberre encourages a positive perception of the situation when she remarks upon the fact that the queen ruling "by wisdom rather than by the sword measures the advance of civilisation, not the inadequacy of the woman ruler" (273). Nevertheless, it remains an unavoidable fact that Elizabeth did not intentionally strive to improve the position of women since most of Elizabeth's efforts utilizing imagery sought only to achieve her personal goals for her reign in spite of her own situation within the patriarchy.

Britomart and Hippolyta, although portrayed as strong women with the ability to command respect, acquiesced to the traditional path for women by marrying and uniting their strength with a husband's support and advice. Britomart and Hippolyta would not reign alone unlike Elizabeth who never did marry. Her continuing unmarried status forced Elizabeth to confront the problem of justifying her decision not to take a consort. Elizabeth's use of the concept of the Prince's two bodies was designed to partially alleviate concerns about her being an unmarried female sovereign, but it did not avoid the fact that the "body politick" ought to be male. Mary Villeponteaux notes that the most desirable

characteristic of a ruler remained virtue, an attribute considered masculine, active, and vigorous (217). Elizabeth did not oppose the preference for a male ruler; indeed, as Julia Walker writes, “[s]imilarly, Elizabeth had declined to change the gender of the ideal ruler, choosing instead to mind ways to speak of herself, legally and metaphorically, as a man” after she ascended the throne (“Spenser’s Elizabeth Portrait” 184). While recognizing that certain aspects of her feminine nature proved useful in keeping men from being threatened by serving her as courtiers, Elizabeth encouraged her court to perceive her as being capable of doing the work of a man. Her decision to remain a virgin, which sought to avoid deferring to a man as her consort, also helped her to avoid open opposition to patriarchal expectations. Elizabeth’s choice of virginity was intended to prevent any offense to the men around her but “deprived her subjects of even the slight comfort her submission to a husband might provide, and added anxiety over the succession” (Bowman 522). Elizabeth acted as the lady who expected her lovers to court her with poetry and gifts.<sup>9</sup> Accepting patriarchal ideas about how an unmarried woman should behave functioned to alleviate her courtiers’ fears; yet, Elizabeth was careful to avoid allowing the men around her to forget she was the ruler.

Judging how a historical figure would weigh imagery of himself or herself can’t be done easily. However, knowledge of Elizabethan ideas about Amazons supports an assumption that Elizabeth would favor the woman warrior image of Britomart to the undesirable image of Amazons. Elizabeth inhabited a complex role by serving as a female sovereign, and her own presentation of herself

allowed recognition of the fact that her role was an unusual and complex one which attempted to balance her feminine virtues with the strength a ruler needed to possess. Edmund Spenser obviously discovered the truth of the queen's multi-faceted role in attempting to create a depiction of her in The Faerie Queene.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> During the reign of Mary I, Protestants focused their future hopes on Elizabeth (Fraser 203). She could easily be seen as the best chance for Protestantism since her birth was the result of her father's break with the Roman Catholic Church. As discussed in Chapter One (24-26,37-40), she used that religious association to justify her legitimacy as heir, but she did not force all of her subjects to follow the same religious beliefs. Instead, Elizabeth's own example directed them to the Bible as the most reliable guide to truth and religious faith.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that Merlin discontinues his detailing of the line of descent at that point significantly supports the connection between the "royall virgin" and Elizabeth for two reasons. First of all, the text of the first three books, published in 1590, came at a time when the future of England's succession was still uncertain. Spenser could not mention any ruler beyond Elizabeth since he did not know who that would eventually be. Secondly, Merlin does not indicate the royal line as dying with that virgin queen. The ancestry that produced Elizabeth did not die with her since James VI of Scotland, the king who eventually succeeded her, was also a descendant of the Tudor line through his grandmother—Margaret Tudor, Henry VIII's sister and Elizabeth's aunt.

<sup>3</sup> In comparing the two characters, it is significant to note the difference in how their development was handled. Edmund Spenser built his depiction of Britomart as a competent warrior woman while recounting the story of her adventures. On the other hand, William Shakespeare, from the start of A Mid-Summer Night's



Dream, acknowledged that the character of Hippolyta was a capable warrior woman, a former Amazon queen who has been wooed by Theseus.

<sup>4</sup> Obviously, it should be observed that this analysis was the opinion of an outside observer. It might not have been a cruel act to the parents and children raised in the culture—in this case, the Amazons and their daughters.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth chose a maternal image, but that presentation had its drawbacks due to inconsistencies between her life and that representation. She styled herself as England's mother but had no children of her own; her lack of offspring increased concerns about the succession and instigated questions about her role as both woman and ruler. Connection to an Amazonian image may have encouraged rumors about children that some said Elizabeth had with Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester (Levin "Gender and Monarchy" 88-89). According to the rumors, those children had been born dead, killed shortly after birth, or sent away (Levin "Gender and Monarchy" 89-90). The idea that she might have killed her own children, although only a rumor, certainly would have placed Elizabeth in an awkward position in defending her life as an unmarried woman.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter Five will further explore the tie between Elizabeth and the theater. If Shakespeare was an alias for a courtier, as some theories have suggested, he may have been acting on Elizabeth's behalf in creating his works. See pages 120-122 of Chapter Five.

<sup>7</sup> This is shown in Spenser's discussion of the aftermath of Radigund's defeat of Artegall. Radigund had embarrassed Artegall and his fellow captive knights by

forcing them to wear women's clothes and perform the domestic tasks expected of women like cleaning the house and spinning yarn (Spenser 5.5.20-23).

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Spenser describes Britomart's decision in the following words: "And changing all that forme of common weale, / The liberty of women did repeale, / Which they had long vsurpt; and them restoring /To mens subjection, did true justice deale" (5.7.42). This illustration reflects a patriarchal viewpoint that women should acquiesce to male authority. Britomart's treatment of the Amazons prevents them from being a threat to her by distinguishing Britomart from them and keeping "them firmly under control" (Bowman 516). Mary Bowman, in suggesting that Britomart and Radigund might allegorically represent Elizabeth and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, points to the episode as a representation of the fact that "[t]o a woman in power, other powerful women are dangerous"—an acknowledgement which "helps us understand Spenser's view of Elizabeth's relationship with other women" (519-520). The fact that Britomart voluntarily defers to Artegall, while retaining a degree of superiority over the Amazons, avoids offending Elizabeth by any hint of a suggestion that women should not have any sort of political power.

<sup>9</sup> The medieval ideas of male subservience to their love shaped Elizabeth's approach to her courtiers. To gain her favor, they had to prove their devotion. Some, like Sir Walter Raleigh, demonstrated their loyalty through poetry dedicated to their sovereign lady. In many ways, it was a contest among the men around Elizabeth as they sought to earn her love and favor. (See Chapter One, pp. 30-32, or the Introduction, pp.11-12).

## Chapter Four

### Spenser and Multiple Mirrors of Elizabeth

Mirrors reflect images of reality; but, those images are not necessarily accurate, and they can be manipulated. In the case of the literary mirrors of Elizabeth I Edmund Spenser created, each mirror image reflected only aspects of Elizabeth; Spenser acknowledged none of his mirrors to be a true and complete reflection of Elizabeth. In fact, Spenser recognized that, because of her "unique" position and the multiple roles it called upon her to play, Elizabeth could be seen in many ways and from many different perspectives. Elizabeth herself used those various potential images to her own advantage; through the patronage system, which allowed her to control her courtiers' privileges and indirectly influence authors, artists, and dramatists, Elizabeth manipulated the image of her that was presented to the English public in literature, art, and plays.

The patronage system was important in Elizabethan society because artists, authors, dramatists, and others seeking a secure future often needed to find a powerful or wealthy benefactor to provide them with political or financial support. Therefore, such people could not afford to anger Elizabeth, who presided as sovereign source of all advancement. Spenser, through the aid of Sir Walter Raleigh, sought to earn Elizabeth's favor. With this in mind, he designed The Faerie Queene as a work in praise of Elizabeth, but it also made the complexity of his monarch's character apparent by using various characters to present different aspects of Elizabeth.<sup>1</sup> Spenser's literary presentation of female sovereignty utilized a variety of female characters who could be mirrors of

Elizabeth; yet, he manipulated those mirrors to send a particular message, either a compliment or a warning.

In "The Vocative and the Vocational: The Unreadability of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*," Elizabeth Bellamy argues that Spenser's effort to portray Elizabeth splinters into different representations—a "proliferation of 'mirrours more than one,' each reflecting its own version of the unnamed Elizabeth" (9).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is possible to perceive the various women depicted by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queen* as representing the many sides of Elizabeth and her role as sovereign—both positive and negative. As sovereign, Elizabeth was mistress to her courtiers, mother to her people, governor of the church, and a patroness to the writers and artists of her realm. Furthermore, as Michael O'Connell points out, "Elizabeth the woman was a queen and a superb politician" (101). Elizabeth quickly recognized the value of perception and manipulated her subjects' view of her to suit her purpose. Similarly, while recognizing that an attempt to depict his sovereign had to acknowledge her complex role as an unmarried female, Spenser also realized that he had to focus attention on the images that were the most favorable to Elizabeth in order to avoid offense that might cost him her favor.

Robin Wells declares that "[a]s a poetic tribute to Elizabeth, *The Faerie Queene* was intended to 'enlarge her prayeses' " (1). Spenser's manipulation of the mirrors of Elizabeth in his work emphasized those mirrors he wanted the reader to pay attention to. The letter he wrote to Sir Walter Raleigh, which was later included as part of the text, began this manipulation since it specifically

directed attention to two representations of Elizabeth within the work—Gloriana and Belphoebe:

And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For,  
 considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall  
 Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull  
 Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe,  
 fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of  
 Cynthia (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana).

(Spenser 16)

Specifically, Spenser indicated that Gloriana and Belphoebe depicted the two sides of Elizabeth that were most often accentuated in representations of her: her capable sovereignty as the queen and her virtuousness as an unmarried woman. Gloriana displays her sovereign wisdom while Belphoebe presides as the primary representation of Elizabeth's chastity. Gloriana and Belphoebe signal "where two of [Spenser's] most important specula were to be, a place where the illumination was most steady and ideal" as he attempted to depict his sovereign, Elizabeth I (O'Connell 99). Both ladies—Gloriana and Belphoebe—were intended to praise a particular characteristic of Elizabeth, but Belphoebe represented the first instance of praising and warning Elizabeth at the same time.

Belphoebe has clear ideas about what honor is and how to achieve it. Spenser identified Belphoebe as a figure of chastity like Britomart, but her comments and reactions probably sent a clear message to Elizabeth as Michael O'Connell recognizes in stating that Spenser "expressed something in Belphoebe

about the complex woman who nobly chose virginity for reasons of state and yet sometimes took personal offense at marriages in her court" (101). O'Connell's observation serves to illuminate the fact that Belphoebe offers advice to Elizabeth through her words and actions. For instance, in speaking with Braggadachio, Belphoebe criticizes court life as a center of insincere actions and a place where men and women seek material gains. She asserts that anyone "[w]ho so in pompe of proud estate" wastes his or her time in courtly affairs will be little remembered (Spenser 2.3.40). Hence, Belphoebe praises people who labor with mind or limb: "But who his limbs with labours and his mind / Behaues with cares, cannot so easie mis. / Abroad in armes, at home in studious kind / Who seekes with painfull toile, shall honor soonest find" (Spenser 2.3.40). To Belphoebe, honor is found in action or serious studies, not the obscurity of court life. Michael O'Connell declares that Belphoebe's words "evoke an Elizabethan ideal of service that we associate with contemporaries like Hawkins, Drake, and Norris, as well as with such familiars of Spenser as Raleigh and Sidney" (104). Belphoebe's comments obliquely refer to the risks of a court that encourages political, social, and literary ambition—a warning that is more fully developed by the portraits of Lucifera's court and the people who seek favor from Philotime. However, O'Connell argues that Belphoebe's depiction submerges "those elements of the court and policy of Elizabeth that we know from satires like *Mother Hubbard's Tale* disturbed Spenser" (106). Developing the character of Belphoebe let Spenser focus on the more honorable aspects of Elizabeth's court. Elizabeth had encouraged exploration and martial endeavors required to defend

England—activities that allowed the men around her to forcefully pursue honor (O'Connell 106). For example, Sir Walter Raleigh developed an American colony that he named Virginia in Elizabeth's honor. Incidents in Ireland and the battle against the Spanish armada also provided opportunities for Elizabeth's courtiers to actively pursue prestige and the privileges of being in Elizabeth's favor. By calling his reader's attention to Belphoebe's words, Spenser might have been acknowledging his approval of such efforts as a means of achieving court positions. Certainly, Spenser's time spent in Ireland, where he met Sir Walter Raleigh, and his effort in creating The Faerie Queene placed him in the company of those who fit Belphoebe's definition of pursuing honor.

Aside from the acknowledged representations, Gloriana and Belphebe, it is difficult to confirm particular reflections of Elizabeth in The Faerie Queene. Nevertheless, in examining the actions and characterizations of other women in the text, it becomes apparent that, as indicated by his statements to Raleigh, Spenser recognized that readers might perceive that several of his female characters reflected praiseworthy elements of Elizabeth's public image. As discussed in the previous chapter, Britomart, Knight of Chastity, provides another representation of Elizabeth's chaste image while also serving as an emblem of the divine will for Elizabeth's reign. Similarly, the character of Una in Book I displays a combination of traits—specifically chastity, femininity, and sovereignty—that would be desirable in a reflection of Elizabeth presented to the general public in England. Robin Wells states that Una depicts "only one facet of Elizabeth's character—her official one" (32). Robin Wells declares that Una and

Belphoebe are both "types of Elizabeth" (53). Each of them represents Elizabeth's imperial power and "symbolize[s] the goddess-like powers of the 'mighty Queene of *Faerie*' "(Wells 53). Una, like Elizabeth, was born of royal lineage: "And by descent from Royall lynage came / Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore / Their scepters stretcht from East to Western shore" (Spenser 1.1.5). Una, wrapped in white, deserves credit as a chaste lady like Britomart and Belphoebe. Spenser depicted Una as innocent "in life and every vertuous lore" (Spenser 1.1.5). Furthermore, Una's connection to the Virgin Mary serves as an example of how the influences of the "Cult of Elizabeth" and Tudor iconography appear in Spenser's The Faerie Queene. As Wells notes, "For an Elizabethan poet undertaking to defend his prince's claim to be the chosen instrument of providence, the popular identification of Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary provided an invaluable repertory of rhetorical techniques" (32). These two sovereign ladies, Una and Britomart, compliment Elizabeth by their association with the best qualities of sovereignty and chaste womanhood. Through them, Spenser emphasized Elizabeth's most important virtue, her chastity, while also acknowledging her ability to govern.

Spenser's work also praised the value of Elizabeth's efforts in religion. Medina in Canto II of Book II, the Book of Temperance, provides a mirror that emphasizes Elizabeth's connection to the golden mean of religious tolerance. Medina's sisters, Elissa and Perissa, represent the conditions of defect and extreme which are moderated by Medina. According to Charles Huntington Whitman, the character of Medina could easily represent the golden mean that



Elizabeth I sought (105). Daryl Gless observes that "[t]emperance can also reduce conflicting passions, as Medina does for instance, when she imposes moments of order on the never-ending strife of her sisters and their lovers" (183). For Elizabeth, the golden mean signified the perfect compromise between Protestant and Catholic ideologies with the Bible as a vital mediator of religious differences. Though it essentially represented an allegory of extremes and the mean, the episode involving Medina and her sisters, Elissa and Perissa, could easily have reflected the fanatical extremes of Edward VI and Mary I in the mind of an Elizabethan reader.<sup>3</sup> The eldest sister, Elissa, is described as follows: "did deeme / such entertainment base, ne ought would eat, / Ne ought would speake, but evermore did seeme / As discontent for want of merth or meat" (Spenser 2.2.35). Elissa may represent Puritans or the type of fanatical Protestantism espoused by Edward VI. As king, Edward VI left little of Roman Catholic ideology in his obsessively Protestant effort to eliminate all idolatry and remove all Roman Catholic and Papal influences. His education resulted in his becoming "fanatically Protestant, as his mentors had intended" (Fraser 194). During Edward's reign, the Bible gained precedence while "glosses of the Early Fathers of the Church" and "veneration of saints" were cast out of the English Church (Fraser 193). The other sister, Perissa, seems to reflect the extreme Catholic efforts of Mary I who strove to retrieve the past of England's Catholic affiliation. Spenser describes Perissa as "[f]ull of dispert, still laughing, loosely light" (2.2.36). She indulges excessively in the food and drink at Medina's dinner (Spenser 2.2.36). Perissa's lack of control in her merry-making mirrors how

Queen Mary's attempts to renew the Catholic faith expanded beyond all efforts to control her and resulted in frequent executions of Protestants. Mary Tudor was convinced that "the ill-success of [her marriage to Philip of Spain] was due to divine vengeance—a punishment for the heresies still practised in England, and so the fires of Smithfield began" (Fraser 200). Mary M. Luke declares that "Mary sincerely believed, as did many of her more thoughtful subjects, that defiance of Papal authority was the root of all unrest and misery among her people" (476). In Mary's opinion, ending Protestantism in England would bring peace and order back to her domain. She sought to eliminate Protestantism in England and would not tolerate any of her subjects who sought to oppose her. Among those who suffered Mary's wrath were "Hooper, the deprived Bishop of Gloucester, " Archbishop Cranmer, Bishop Ridley, and Bishop Latimer (Fraser 200). Many Protestants fled Mary's England to avoid facing persecution and death. Just as Medina sought to bridge the extremes of her sisters' attitudes, Elizabeth sought to reconcile the different religious factions of England. She avoided absolute government advocacy of Protestantism in order to placate worried Catholics; instead, she chose to encourage all people to trust in study of the Bible to direct them properly on religious matters.

John King, in Tudor Royal Iconography, illuminates the use of symbols to represent Protestant concepts. One such emblem associated with Elizabeth was the icon of "the sword and the book, " which she utilized to represent the Bible and her emphasis on bible study as the path to truth. Protestants emphasized the value of the vernacular as a means of increasing the Bible's value as a

source of spiritual knowledge. Indeed, John King declares that “[r]estoration of the vernacular Bible as a source of spiritual understanding” was “a fundamental Protestant concern” (Tudor Iconography 54). The Protestant icon of the book became a symbol of reformation royalism (King Tudor Iconography 57). The sword, especially in connection to St. Paul, represented the “sword of spirit” embodied by the word of God presented in the Bible (King Tudor Iconography 60). Furthermore, the sword suggested the concept of justification by faith alone, which Paul—the paramount saint of Protestantism—spoke of in his Epistles to the Romans (King Tudor Iconography 59). This factor became important during Elizabeth’s reign because it allowed the concept of personal belief that was essential to religious tolerance. If faith justified a person’s belief, the individual should have little to fear. The sword, combined with the book, advocated the value of reading and studying the Bible to develop one’s own beliefs based on the Bible’s teachings. This concept became the hallmark of Elizabeth’s religious policy.

Elizabeth’s application of the iconography of “the sword and the book” related to how she sought to create a golden mean of religious tolerance that would allow her subjects to live together in peace. Though Elizabeth restored the Protestant practices of her father and brother, particularly the Bible’s position as a tool of spiritual instruction and symbol of royal authority, she sought to maintain peace for all of her subjects. Indeed, John King notes that “Elizabeth’s imagery emphasized the priority of the book over the sword in an assertion that she dedicated herself to peace rather than war” (Tudor Iconography 56).<sup>4</sup> “The

Sword and the book, " in representing the Bible's proper role as a means of acquiring spiritual knowledge, also denoted the ideal of justifying one's faith through study of the Bible. As Daryl Gless observes, "[r]eformed descriptions of faith normally ascribe three characteristics to its possessors: an ever-increasing knowledge of the truths of the Bible, especially of the Gospel's merciful promises; a particular application of those promises to the believer himself; and a resilient assurance that God's good will enables the believer to persevere in grace" (41). Elizabeth was a student of the Bible, and authors and artists presented her as such when she was associated with "the sword and the book" as an icon: "[m]uch more common than presentations of the queen with the Sword and the Book are her portrayals as the Protestant heroine and savior of England who reads or carries a Bible or evangelical book" (King Tudor Iconography 104). Elizabeth, since her brother's death, had been viewed as the best hope for the survival of Protestantism in England. Indeed, the title page of *The Bishop's Bible* places her portrait between the images of faith and charity; this placement marks the belief in Elizabeth as "personifying the Hope brought by gospel faith" (King Tudor Iconography 105). Elizabeth, "as England's only 'Hope' for resolution of religious discord," carefully cultivated an image as a peaceful and godly ruler (King Tudor Iconography 107). Elizabeth's emphasis on the book became a part of attempts to represent her. In studying Spenser, a reader can discover several examples of the depiction of a book. Several of these instances point to a female character that illustrates an aspect of Elizabeth's struggle for a religious settlement that would satisfy all of her subjects.

The book carried by the character of Fidelia in Canto X of Book I serves as a significant part of the vivid portrayal of Elizabeth's emphasis on books, especially the Bible, as guides to religious truth and salvation. Since belief in God requires faith, it is appropriate that Fidelia, who represents faith, becomes the Redcrosse Knight's first instructor as he strives to return to the path of holiness after encounters with duplicity, in the person of Duessa, and despair. In teaching him, she uses the Bible she carries as a guide. When Fidelia is introduced, the book she carries is described in a way that suggests the Bible: "And in her other hand she fast did hold / A booke, that was both signd and seald with blood, / Wherein darke things were writ, hard to be vnderstood" (Spenser 1.10.13). The fact that only those who are taught to interpret that book can fully understand it, once again asserts the need to read and interpret the Bible. Fidelia's effort to teach the Redcrosse Knight about the Bible aptly symbolizes the way Elizabeth encouraged study of the Bible. Spenser describes Fidelia's effort to teach Redcrosse the meaning of the Bible's words in the following passage:

She vnto him disclosed every whit,  
 And heavenly documents therout did preach,  
 That weaker wit of man could neuer reach,  
 Of God, of grace, of iustice, of free will,  
 That wonder was to heare her goodly speach:  
 For she was able, with her words to kill,  
 And raise againe to life the hart, that she did thrill. (1.10.19)

Fidelia's instruction helps the Redcrosse Knight begin to discover his own path to observing God's law and subsequent salvation. Elizabeth hoped that bible study would help her subjects recognize how to live together peacefully in spite of religious differences. Even more importantly, Elizabeth championed the concept that only by reading and understanding the Bible can a person discover God's laws and achieve salvation and a place in heaven. Fidelia's teaching of the Redcrosse Knight emphasized these ideas.

In Book Two, the character of Alma depicts wise sovereignty and "the soul and body in pristine condition" while also encouraging personal understanding of history (Gless 190). Daryl Gless asserts that Spenser's characterization of Alma "tempers all mental and physical functions, creating harmonious relations between elements, organs, faculties and emotions" (190). Like Elizabeth, Alma acts in the best interest of her people. When Guyon and Prince Arthur arrive, her castle is tightly guarded because of the attacks of raiders who have been plaguing her people. A guard tells them to fly "[i]f that your liues ye loue, as meete ye should / Fly fast, and saue your selues from neare decay, / Here may ye not haue entraunce, though we would: / We would and would againe, if that we could; / But thousand enemies about vs raue, / And with long siege vs in the castle hould" (Spenser 2.9.12). Guyon and Prince Arthur break off an attack and are admitted with Alma's gratitude as described in the following quote from the text:

Thus when they had that troublous rout disperst,  
Vnto the castle gate they come againe,

And entraunce crau'd, which was denied erst.

Now when report of that their perilous paine,

And combrous conflict, which they did sustaine,

Came to the Ladies eare, which there did dwell,

She forth issewed with a goodly traine

Of Squires and Ladies equipaged well,

And entertained them right fairely, as befell. (Spenser 2.9.17)

Later, while showing her castle to Guyon and Prince Arthur, Alma introduces them to her advisors: "The first of them could things to come forsee: / The next could of things present best aduize; / The third things past could keepe in memoree" (Spenser 2.9.49). Alma has her advisors, but they provide advice and teachings, not orders: "These three in these three roomes did sundry dwell, / And counselled faire *Alma* how to gouerne well" (Spenser 2.9.48). Most importantly, Alma continues the pattern of encouraging reading by granting Guyon and Prince Arthur's requests to read some books of history (Spenser 2.9.60). By reading the texts, Guyon and Prince Arthur gain the opportunity to develop their own understanding of history. Similarly, by reading and studying the Bible, Elizabeth's subjects could improve their personal knowledge of God's word.

While Spenser supported Elizabeth's religious policy through his literary endeavor by presenting a favorable reflection of Elizabeth's religious stance, he also manipulated two other mirror images—the characters of Lucifera and Philotime—to reflect the potential dangers inherent in the nature of the court Elizabeth created through her manipulation of patronage. Elizabeth encouraged

her courtiers to vie for her attention and favor by using courtly love patterns as the model for her courtiers' approach to her. The court atmosphere this system created generated a lot of danger since rivalries ensued between the courtiers who were closest to Elizabeth. Elizabeth's favorites—like Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex—especially attracted other male courtiers' jealousy. Leicester's relationship with the queen particularly stimulated hostility which "owed much to political self-interest" (Doran 44). Walter Oakeshott describes the competition for Elizabeth's favor as seeming like "a girls' school rather than [like] an adult society" when anyone—like Leicester, or Essex—achieved enough position to be universally recognized as "having attained a dominating, if hazardously insecure position"(27). Often, having the queen's favor also provided her favorites with financial and political advantages; therefore, the men at court who sought Elizabeth's favor resented those courtiers who already possessed the queen's favor.<sup>5</sup>

While some of Elizabeth's favorites may have been motivated by admiration for her in seeking a place at her side, many of the courtiers who vied for Elizabeth's attention did so only to further their own interests. Differences in opinion and opposing interests led to factions within the court formed by courtiers with similar interests who sought to aid one another for their own advancement and prestige. Those men at court with common goals often sought to help each other to oppose fellow favorites who held a different opinion. Such factional interests often divided Elizabeth's court as courtiers fought for their own best interests. For instance, the issue of Elizabeth's marriage encouraged factional



divisions involving Cecil, Leicester, and the Howards while also exacerbating "personal conflicts among courtiers and councilors, which could easily get out of hand and disrupt political stability" (Doran 51). The men around Elizabeth had their own reasons for supporting particular suitors, and they fought hard to sway her to their way of thinking. Interestingly, her courtiers' disagreements proved to be a distinct advantage in Elizabeth's manipulation of patronage. The lack of agreement about her suitors allowed Elizabeth to avoid marriage since the full support of the privy council was needed to approve a marriage contract. More importantly, by remaining unmarried, Elizabeth continued to be available as the object of her courtiers' affections and to enjoy their company.

Acknowledgement of this political atmosphere at court required Spenser to use his work for a secondary purpose: to warn Elizabeth about the possibility of such efforts damaging the security of her realm. Through the character of Duessa, Spenser displays duplicity at its worst. In Book I, after the deceitful wizard named Archimago convinces the Redcrosse Knight that Una betrayed his trust, Duessa tricks Redcrosse into taking her as his lady in place of Una. After Redcrosse abandons her and is betrothed to Una, Duessa plots with Archimago and appears to Guyon as a lady in distress: "But vnder simple shew and semblant plaine / Lurckt false *Duessa* secretly vnseene, / As a chaste Virgin, that had wronged beene" (Spenser 2.1.21). Duessa appears again in Cantos IX and X of Book V as a foe of Mercilla. In that episode, it has been suggested that she represents Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots (Bowman 519). Mary had threatened the security of Elizabeth's reign from the beginning by stating her own claim to

the English throne, which was technically more legitimate (Neal 56). Walter Oakeshott observes that Duessa's connection to Mary is strengthened by her association with the Redcrosse Knight in Book I. Duessa leads Redcrosse astray just as "Mary inevitably occupied [a threatening position] vis-à-vis the reformed English church which she 'plotted' to lead back to Catholicism" (89). Duessa seeks to claim Redcrosse's allegiance when he is about to be betrothed to Una even as Mary Stuart asserted her right to the throne of England as Elizabeth prepared to claim it. Mary became the focus of many plots to replace Elizabeth including the Ridolfi plot and the Babington plot.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Duessa seeks to overthrow Mercilla and place herself on the throne.

In the cases of Lucifera's entourage and the people who seek to climb to Philotime, daughter of Mammon in Canto VII of Book II, Spenser's mirrors sought to call Elizabeth's attention to the dangers inherent in the presence of the favor seekers who came to her court. Lucifera, queen of the house of pride in Canto IV of Book I, has the same strength and control of her court that Elizabeth had; yet, Elizabeth would have been offended by the suggestion that her court was as corrupt as Lucifera's. The presence of the seven deadly sins at Lucifera's court resisted any but a poor opinion of Lucifera's realm. Among the deadly sins, as the people of Elizabethan England saw them, were the vices of greed and lechery which were probably the most prominent potential sins of Elizabeth and her courtiers (Secara <http://rendm.net/compendium/home.html>).<sup>7</sup> In Elizabeth's court, many of the courtiers sought power and wealth; therefore, observers may have feared that greed would prompt members of the court to forget the best

interests of the people. Lecherous courtiers might also have threatened the purity of Elizabeth's public image. While still only a princess, she had been forced to defend herself against stories that suggested she had become involved in an unauthorized relationship with Thomas Seymour, husband of her father's widow, Catherine Parr (Cavanagh 11-17). Elizabeth, recognizing such behavior as reminiscent of her parents, would have wanted to avoid association with such behavior (Cavanagh 17); therefore, such hearsay about her behavior posed a problem for her. As queen, such rumors became even more problematic. Once she became queen, rumors about Elizabeth could be interpreted as seditious since Parliament acknowledged suggestions that Elizabeth should not be queen as a type of treason (Levin "Gender, Monarchy" 87). The way in which Spenser used the character of *Lucifera* allowed him to conceive an image of the dangers Elizabeth's court faced without connecting Elizabeth directly to *Lucifera*.

Although Spenser did not directly associate *Lucifera*'s court with Elizabeth's, *Philotime*'s court displayed the darker side of the Elizabethan court and its patronage system: "*Philotime* not only casts a reversed image of idealized *Belpheban* honor. What is disquieting is that her court is a quite recognizable version of the more sinister side of the actual court Spenser knew" (O'Connell 105). It was not difficult to see a resemblance between the people around *Philotime* and some of Elizabeth's most ambitious courtiers who struggled against each other to gain advantages. Spenser describes *Philotime*'s courtiers in the following manner:

Some thought to raise themselves to high degree,

By riches and unrighteous reward,  
 Some by close shouldering, some by flatteree;  
 Others through friends, others for base regard,  
 And all by wrong wayes for themselves prepared.  
 Those that were up themselues, kept others low,  
 Those that were low themselues, held others hard.

(Spenser 2.7.47)

Philotime held the chain of ambition through which all of them sought to gain advantages while denying others a similar opportunity to advance their position (Spenser 2.7.46). Likewise, the courtiers who sought Elizabeth's favor used alliances to rise in prestige while fighting to keep rivals from gaining more privileges. According to Michael O'Connell, Spenser pointedly insists that Philotime provides an image not specifically of Elizabeth but of "the moral corruption of which all monarchs are capable" (O'Connell 106-107). In creating his depiction of Philotime, Spenser probably sought to avoid direct correlation between Philotime and Elizabeth while warning his sovereign that the ambitious rivalry among her courtiers could be dangerous. His desire for patronage would have caused Spenser to shun offending Elizabeth while desiring to appear of use by offering necessary advice.

In The Faerie Queene, Edmund Spenser created a text that "mirror[ed] [Elizabeth's] own multivalent image" (Walker "Spenser's Elizabeth Portrait" 175). Julia Walker notes that Elizabeth's complex image as "[m]onarch, virgin, mother, warrior, lover, [and] goddess" provided a challenge for artists and authors of the

Elizabethan period since "highlighting one aspect of this image at the expense or to the exclusion of another" was not only difficult but could endanger whatever patronage the author or artist enjoyed ("Spenser's Elizabeth Portrait" 176). Elizabeth Bellamy correctly asserts that Edmund Spenser, in The Faerie Queene, sought to present an accurate image of Elizabeth, but his attempt splintered into a pattern of multiple mirrors. The Faerie Queene served as "a hall of mirrors" for Elizabeth (O'Connell 99); however, like the mirror imagery typical of Renaissance art, those mirrors "never returned an exact reflection" (O'Connell 19). Instead, Spenser's images of his sovereign reflected aspects of Elizabeth's personality. Some complimented Spenser's sovereign lady, Elizabeth, while others sought to provide warnings or advice. Spenser acknowledged his effort to represent Elizabeth in his letter to Raleigh, but such recognition remained rare during Elizabeth's reign because Elizabeth's effort to shape her public image forced authors to carefully consider how they represented her. This attention to representation influenced Spenser and dramatists like William Shakespeare as they sought to gain patronage and any other advantage of favor they could obtain.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Aside from mentioning Gloriana and Belphebe as aspects of Elizabeth, Spenser's letter to Raleigh fails to explain who represents Elizabeth (Bellamy 4). The representations are dispersed between Belphebe, Gloriana, Britomart, Medina, and Mercilla (Walker "Spenser's Elizabeth Portrait" 176).

<sup>2</sup> A note at the end of Bellamy's article states that "Spenser's title teasingly points the way to a proliferation of analogous personae for Elizabeth, all valid yet finally invalidated, and withholds disclosure of the Faerie Queene's identity" (25 note 4). In stating this, Bellamy is pointing out that Spenser never says that any one character is absolutely Elizabeth. Instead, all of the various female characters who could be seen as mirrors of Elizabeth possess qualities or positions which suggest Elizabeth, but none of them possesses every aspect of Elizabeth.

<sup>3</sup> Antonia Fraser, in The Lives of the Kings and Queens of England, discusses the lives of each Tudor monarch. For more information on Edward VI and Protestantism, see pages 192-194 of Fraser's text. Mary I and Catholicism are emphasized on pages 198-199 of Fraser's text and on pages 476-478 of Mary M. Luke's A Crown for Elizabeth.

<sup>4</sup> The woodcut called "Elizabeth Regina" illustrates this fact. A prayer book is clearly displayed while a sword laid before "the cushion upon which the queen kneels is cut short" (King Tudor Iconography 115). As King describes, Elizabeth was said to keep a rusty, unused sword in her private chambers to remind her that she had the corrective power of force in reserve if the peace she desired alluded her (Tudor Iconography 115).

<sup>5</sup> The Queen's favorites were often hated for possession of "lucrative monopolies, large royal grants of land and money, [and] an influential and highly conspicuous place in the court (Greenblatt Sir Walter Raleigh 74). Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex, were two favorites who were particularly envied by their fellow courtiers. Susan Doran notes that, like Cecil and Sir Nikolas Throckmorton, disapproved of Leicester's close relationship with the queen because his courtship of the queen "would impugn her honor" since there were already rumors about them (44). Furthermore, their courtship was unlikely to result in a beneficial marriage since Dudley was "too controversial a figure in personality and politics" to become Elizabeth's consort "without dividing her court and people" (Fraser 206). Dudley's stepson, Robert Devereaux, who was also Earl of Essex, became the focus of Elizabeth's favor in the later part of her reign (Fraser 211). Essex found a rival in Robert Cecil; yet, his true undoing was a conspiracy in which he rallied his followers to attempt a takeover at court, which was intended to alleviate the frustrations many courtiers felt in dealing with the older and very cautious Elizabeth (Fraser 211).

<sup>6</sup> In her Compendium of Common Knowledge, Maggie Secara provides a section titled "Mary Queen of Scots, an incredibly brief account." That section observes how numerous "serious plots revolved around' Mary (Secara <http://rendm.net/compendium/home.html>). The Ridolfi Plot and the Babington plot were the main such plans involving Mary's claim to the throne (Secara <http://rendm.net/compendium/home.html>). For more on the plots and relevance of Mary Stuart, see Kathy Lynn Emerson's The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in

Renaissance England: From 1485-1649 (101), Neville Williams' Elizabeth the First, Queen of England, (171-175 & 272-275), and Jasper Ridley's Elizabeth I: The Shrewdness of Virtue (159 & 174).

<sup>7</sup> Secara's section on "Virtue and Vice, or vice-versa" lists Despair, Hatred, Vanity, Greed, Anger, Gluttony, and Pride as the most deadly sins "[a]ccording to the Church, and thus to Western man" (Secara <http://rendm.net/compendium/home.html>).



## Chapter Five

### Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Impact of Elizabeth I on Theatre

Edmund Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh provides critics with evidence that certain characters in The Faerie Queene, including Gloriana and Belphoebe, are representatives of Elizabeth. In contrast, William Shakespeare made no specific claim that a character in his A Mid-Summer Night's Dream served as a reflection of Elizabeth. It remains difficult to deny, however, that the theater of Elizabethan England, like the art and literature of the period, illustrates how concerns about patronage discouraged unfavorable depictions of queens before an aristocratic audience. Chapter Four illuminates the fact that artists, authors, and dramatists seeking patronage endeavored to avoid unfavorable representations of female sovereignty because they feared the queen's displeasure, and William Shakespeare was no exception. The queens in Shakespeare's plays could have been perceived as reflective of the realm's current sovereign, Elizabeth I; therefore, he had to be careful to avoid offending her in how he presented his queens.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, two of the female characters in his A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, the fairy queen Titania and the Amazon queen Hippolyta, displayed characteristics that Elizabeth preferred not to ponder—a passionate, and an unwomanly nature.

Elizabeth's presence on the throne of England must have influenced the presentation of women in her realm's theater since the reigning sovereign served as chief patron of the realm. Elizabeth's reaction to a theatrical performance

possessed the potential to help or harm the playwright since as queen, Elizabeth was at once the "impetus for performance and...its ultimate judge" (Henderson 111). Frank Whigham underscores this fact in stating that "[c]ompetition was channelled and institutionalized, reminding everyone that all roads led to the queen" (49). Elizabeth's reign forced dramatists to tread cautiously in representing regal ladies who might be associated with the reality of Elizabeth's court. Elizabeth's power over court positions and privileges encouraged the men around her, especially artists, authors, and dramatists to heed Elizabeth's own choices in her public image. Patronage allowed Elizabeth to shape how the theater used her image because dramatists recognized that Elizabeth's presence at a performance made her the principal audience whose royal attendance "allows the show" (Henderson 75). Preventing charges of slander or treason was important in a world where John Stubbs's attack on Elizabeth's official courtship with the French Duke of Alencon earned him the loss of a hand—specifically, "the axing of his authorial hand" (Henderson 87). Dramatists' depictions of women had to balance the demands of patriarchal views, expectations of women, and the need to maintain patronage through Elizabeth's court. It became problematic to depict women as submissive to men while granting "the veneration of an exceptional, powerful courtly woman—a tension aggravated when that woman is the queen" (Henderson 80). Dramatists could not create too clear an image of Elizabeth for fear of offending her; instead, they tended to use elements of Elizabeth's own public image in their female characters to serve as praise of her.

As Diana Henderson has noted, Elizabeth's reign brought a renewal of literature and theater (33). Elizabeth encouraged the revival of drama because the theater provided a location for people to gather which bore no special link to religion. Indeed, Elizabethan-era dramatists used mythical figures and elements of folklore to take the place of religious references that might have offended part of the audience (Young 25). Whether they were Catholic or Protestant, the people of England could attend a theatrical performance without perceiving it as a challenge to their religious beliefs. Theatre also brought the people of England together socially under circumstances that permitted Elizabeth's subjects to avoid having to ponder religious concerns. The people of Elizabethan England could mingle at a theater without having to hear about or discuss religious issues. This fact helped Elizabeth's effort to avoid stringent recommendation of one religion. Because of the theater's potential as a gathering site for her subjects, it certainly would have been a place where Elizabeth could manipulate presentations of women to support her reign and publicize her carefully crafted public image.

Shakespeare, like other Elizabethan dramatists, elected to use mythic figures to suggest a spiritual atmosphere without offending followers of any religion. In A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, Shakespeare depicts a "curious mixture of wood spirits and household gods, pagan deities and local pixies" (Young 26). This mixture of myth and magic culminates in Shakespeare's character of Titania, the fairy queen, who can be linked to magic and the potential danger of women in powerful positions. The women Shakespeare chooses to associate Titania with demonstrate how Elizabethan England avoided

literal presentations of religious figures in literature, art, or drama while also showing how the choices of mythic figures reflected feelings about women in power. Among the women Titania is associated with are Diana, the Greco-Roman Goddess of the Hunt, and Circe, a mythical sorceress best known for turning men into beasts.<sup>2</sup> Diana, one of the names used for the Greek goddess Artemis, alludes to the night and the moon (Hamilton 31-32). It is an interesting connection because Titania, during the moonlit night described in a Mid-Summer Night's Dream, suffers from the effects of a spell Oberon casts upon her.

Furthermore, Diana, also called Cynthia, was associated with "[p]raise of Elizabeth's chastity" especially after "the 'moon cult' of Elizabeth" developed in the 1580's and 1590's (King "Queen Elizabeth I" 43).<sup>3</sup> Circe, best known through the adventures of the Greek hero Odysseus presented in Homer's The Odyssey, transformed men into pigs. Circe cast her spells to reveal men's true nature. Such a power could intimidate men—just as Elizabeth's position as sovereign posed a threat to the men around her.

Shakespeare's allusions to Diana and Circe showcase the primary difficulty that Elizabeth dealt with. In order to maintain control of her court, Elizabeth needed to persuade the men around her that her power as sovereign would not be used in any way that would threaten them unless such actions were necessary to maintain order. Elizabeth's government included no standing army or extensive police force (Greenblatt Shakespearean Negotiations 64). Elizabeth carefully avoided any displays of power that would threaten the men around her. Instead, she chose to use more subtle forms of persuasion like manipulation of

her public image, use of courtly love patterns, and the concept of the Prince's two bodies. Her power as a patroness allowed her to indirectly influence men seeking favor. Such men knew that they needed to please her to gain the privileges they sought, and Elizabeth preferred depictions of her that utilized the public image she sought to cultivate—that of a maiden queen who cared for her people above all.

Even as Titania's depiction displayed the use of mythic figures to represent religious elements in the theatre, Shakespeare's depiction of her relationship with the natural world illustrated the connection between fairies and flowers depicted in folklore and literature. Helen Hackett states that "[t]he association of fairies with flowers can be traced back through both folklore and the literary tradition" (67). The world of the fairies that Shakespeare created utilized that connection to depict Titania's role as a part of the natural world. Titania's choice of resting-place or bower, which Oberon describes to Puck in the following words, reflects how Titania revels in the natural world around her:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
 where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
 Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
 With sweet musk roses and eglantine. (Shakespeare 2.1.249-252)

Her bower is a place where Titania can establish contact with the natural world and enjoy its presence all around her. However, the natural world around her could also be dangerous to her—a fact made apparent by Oberon's use of a

flower struck by cupid's arrow to cause Titania to fall in love with Bottom, a simple Athenian workman.

The flowers Shakespeare referred to in his text fit into the tradition where eglantine, like that mentioned in Oberon's description of Titania's bower, was used as an emblem of Elizabeth I (Hackett 67). Indeed, the flowers given to Elizabeth I at the 1575 entertainment at Woodstock were presented by a handmaid of the fairy queen (Hackett 67). The connection to that particular event of 1575 helps distance Titania from Elizabeth since the flowers given at that event were presented as a gift from the fairy queen. The floral motif at once links and separates Elizabeth from Titania. Hackett, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, argues that Spenser influenced Shakespeare's use of flowers: "Spenser's catalogue of flowers [in his Shepearde's Calendar] offers incantatory and decorative pleasures which Shakespeare emulates in Oberon's lines on Titania's bower and elsewhere" (68). Shakespeare's woods evoked classical and courtly literature as well as the English countryside through "a world full of supernatural presences...in which the trees and flowers are peopled by spirits, the forest creatures are anthropomorphic, and the landscape is teeming with vitality and activity" (Hackett 68). It is a world where magical things happen, and that sense of magic allowed Shakespeare to narrate a tale that related to Elizabeth without offending his sovereign.

Shakespeare, like other playwrights, needed to avoid offending those in power, especially Elizabeth, so he could maintain the patronage necessary to continue his productions. To do so, he had to divert Elizabeth's attention from

the unfavorable aspects of two female characters in his A Mid-Summer Night's Dream: the fairy queen Titania and the Amazon queen Hippolyta. As female sovereigns, they would suggest Elizabeth; however, by placing the characters in a world filled with references to folklore and myth, Shakespeare also removed Titania and Hippolyta from the Elizabethan context of female rule. As Diana Henderson describes it, "Shakespeare's drama relies on the effective removal of lyric from the public domain it had occupied within the Elizabethan court, and removes female political power along with it" (219). The characters of Titania and Hippolyta were placed in an atmosphere of patriarchy through male domination and marriage.

Titania reigned as queen of her court but had to deal with the actions and influence of Oberon, her husband and the king of her domain. As noted in Chapter Two, Oberon interfered with the gatherings of Titania and her followers while seeking Titania's changeling boy. In an incident that obliges ideals of patriarchal control, Oberon's mastery over Titania is reasserted under the moon as he "humiliates his Fairy Queen, only to gain her gratitude as well as her changeling boy on the morning after" (Henderson 222). Titania accepts Oberon as an equal in the running of their kingdom, and, united again, they proceed with blessing the marriages in Athens: Theseus to Hippolyta, Lysander to Hermia, and Demetrius to Helena.

In the case of Hippolyta, the Amazon queen accepts the authority of her chosen husband, Theseus, out of love. For example, she acquiesces to Theseus's selection of performances for their wedding celebration. Hippolyta

initially objects to the choice of the mechanicals' performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" because of Philostrate's comments that the piece is simple and "conn'd with cruel pain" (Shakespeare 5.1.80). However, Theseus persuades her that, since it is intended as a gesture of respect, they should give the mechanicals a chance and be kind by giving "them thanks for nothing" (Shakespeare 5.1.89). Theseus suggests that they make it their sport "to take what they [the mechanicals] mistake", and Hippolyta silently agrees (Shakespeare 5.1.90). In the end, these two queens—Titania and Hippolyta—quietly accept their husbands' advice in spite of misgivings. Shakespeare's real life sovereign, Elizabeth, did not have a consort or any man with a similar degree of authority over her; therefore, the presence of consorts for the fairy queen and the Amazon queen increased the distance between the world Shakespeare created in A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, and the world in which Elizabeth reigned.

Although Shakespeare strove to prevent any chance of offending Elizabeth, the character of Titania could have been viewed as a mirror of the less desirable side of Elizabeth's femininity. The liaison with Bottom and her passionate argument with Oberon over the changeling boy showed Titania to be a woman of fervent emotion. Indeed, Shakespeare depicts Titania as a willful and passionate woman. When Titania enters the play, Oberon greets her in the following words: "ill met by moonlight, proud Titania" (Shakespeare 2.1.60). As has been described in Chapter Two, Titania opposes Oberon's effort to acquire her page, a changeling boy whose deceased mother was a dear friend and follower; indeed, she asserts her intention of rearing the boy herself for his



mother's sake (Shakespeare 2.1.135-137).<sup>4</sup> The quarrel between Oberon and Titania demonstrates how patriarchal society sought to control women; but it did not specifically relate to Elizabeth I since Elizabeth, unlike Titania, had no man of equal status within her realm who could interfere in her affairs without fear of losing his position. Indeed, Oberon's presence and Shakespeare's allusions to myth and folklore probably distracted Elizabeth and any other audience members from any potential connection between Titania and Elizabeth. By diverting Elizabeth's attention from this connection, Shakespeare avoided a representation that suggested Elizabeth was subject to desire like all other women—a portrayal that would clash with the monarch's virginal image. However, the willfulness of Titania's feud with Oberon over the changeling boy could have reminded court members of Elizabeth's willful nature and quick temper in dealing with courtiers who displeased her. Titania's attachments to the changeling boy and Bottom echo how loyal Elizabeth could be to her favorites and how abruptly her favor could be lost. Many courtiers, including Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, commented on being frustrated "with Elizabeth's perceived willfulness and fickleness of favour, traits which were attributed to her age and her femaleness" (Hackett 22); in 1597, Devereux told a French ambassador that the English court labored under "delay and inconstancy, which proceeded chiefly from the sex of the Queen" (qtd. in Hackett 22). The way in which Titania's affections were easily influenced by the power of Cupid's magic reflected that side of Elizabeth, but Shakespeare's use of folklore and myth helped detract from the similarities.

Patriarchal ideas reasoned that a woman's passionate nature would make a female ill suited for governing a kingdom. Mary I of England had caused a great deal of hardship for the people of England through her fanatical attachment to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> England's recent experience with female sovereignty affected Elizabeth's approach to religious matters and her position as a female sovereign; in seeking to secure her reign, Elizabeth would have disliked any perception of her as a passionate woman since such an impression of her would have evoked unpleasant memories of the turmoil created by Mary's religious policies. As Joan Kelly notes, female sexuality was severely regulated ("Did Women have a Renaissance?" 20). Women's desires, in some cases, were believed to lead to threatening behavior. Crimes women committed, like infanticide and husband murders, were often explained as the result of "female lustfulness, vanity, and frailty" which instigated sexual transgressions (Staub 115). Suggesting that she was similarly susceptible to the frailties of a woman's nature could have marred Elizabeth's image as a maiden queen; therefore, a passionate and willful perception of her was something Elizabeth sought to avoid and used patronage to discourage; therefore, Shakespeare was careful not to associate Elizabeth with Titania, a passionate female character in his play. The only allusion in A Mid-Summer Night's Dream that appears to reflect Elizabeth is a description of the "fair vestal" cupid's arrow was intended for when it hit the flower Oberon uses against Titania:

...A certain aim he took

At a fair vestal throned by [the] west,

And loos'd his love shaft smartly from his bow,  
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;  
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft  
 Quench'd in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,  
 And the imperial vot'ress passed on,  
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free. (Shakespeare 2.1.157-164)

To people influenced by Elizabeth's public image, this allusion would have sounded a lot like Elizabeth who had been courted frequently but never married. Elizabeth encouraged her public image as a virginal queen, a maiden lady who had not yet been caught by the power of Cupid's magic. Shakespeare's allusion to the "fair vestal" provided a compliment that exploited Elizabeth's desire to cultivate a chaste image and drew her attention away from Titania.

Descriptions of Shakespeare suggest that he was shrewd enough to recognize how Elizabeth wanted to be perceived by the people of her kingdom and to utilize her public image for his purposes in seeking favor. Indeed, critics have debated Shakespeare's familiarity with the Elizabethan court and whether or not Shakespeare was actually a pseudonym for a courtier. Howard Chua-Eoan notes that scholars have pointed out many reasons to believe that Shakespeare was an alias:

What if the real Shakespeare had led another life, one tingling with clear parallels to his sonnets and plays? What if he were really a nobleman, an earl who could trace his roots back to a time before William the conqueror? And what if, unlike the man from Stratford-

on-Avon, we had an undeniable record of his education—a degree from Oxford University and a solid grounding in the law that would explain the plenitude of Tudor legalese in the plays? Again, unlike the Stratford man, this nobleman would have once resided in Venice, the site of several plays. (74)

Chua-Eoan points out factors that support the candidacy of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford—“the hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain and a sometime favorite of Elizabeth I’s”—as the author behind Shakespeare’s plays, but the points he alludes to also reflect the reasons why critics wonder whether Shakespeare was a pseudonym (74). During Elizabeth’s reign, many courtiers may have considered it unseemly to publish or produce a work for the public, but the fact remains that a courtier would be the person most likely to comprehend the world of court, and Elizabeth, well enough to help the queen manipulate the theater for her purposes. If Shakespeare were indeed a courtier, whether Edward de Vere or someone else, it would explain how he managed to depict court life so effectively as well as his recognition of what Elizabeth’s public image meant in terms of presenting women—especially royal ladies—in theatrical performances.

In A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream, Shakespeare displays an understanding of Elizabeth’s concern with avoiding a perception of herself as a threat to men through Titania and Hippolyta. His character of Titania, though the female character most clearly surrounded by magic, displays no mystical powers of her own. Indeed, she is manipulated by a man’s use of magic—specifically, Oberon’s use of the flower struck by Cupid’s arrow. Similarly, the character of

Hippolyta, though a warrior, has apparently been largely tamed by her love for Theseus. Hippolyta goes on a hunt with Theseus, but her character is shown in a much more positive light than reports about Amazons suggested they should be characterized. Reports of the period, alluded to by Mary Villeponteux, depicted Amazons as brutal mothers who either killed or abandoned their sons and, in accordance with their traditions, disfigured their daughters by searing off the young girls' right breasts. Elizabeth sought to avoid association with an unwomanly image, and dramatists, including Shakespeare, obliged her by creating gentler versions of Amazons in their representations. Shakespeare's Amazon queen, Hippolyta, as discussed in Chapter Three, provides a representation of an Amazon that was typical of the Elizabethan stage but very different from the off-stage image of Amazons.<sup>6</sup> In Shakespeare's depiction of her, Hippolyta continues to be comfortable on a hunt, but is not war-like or a threat to the men around her. Hippolyta, like Titania, was situated in circumstances that placed her under the dominance of a man. She looks forward to her wedding day and marriage to Theseus, the man who won her heart in battle; indeed, the key factor in their relationship is that Hippolyta clearly chooses to marry him. Hippolyta anticipates their marriage as she reminds Theseus that their wedding day approaches quickly: "Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; \ Four nights will quickly dream away the time" (Shakespeare 1.1.7-8). She joins Theseus on a hunt but accepts his decisions about their wedding celebration. Hippolyta accepts male equality rather than opposing Theseus's decisions. By creating this gentler version of Hippolyta, Shakespeare used

dramatic perceptions of Amazons to detract from the unfavorable characteristics of Amazons while maintaining the patronage and favor he possessed. Such a refashioning of the Amazon image allowed Elizabeth to maintain the rights of sovereign power without being seen as a threat to men.

Shakespeare's version of Hippolyta suggests the difference between Elizabeth and the female sovereigns who came before her. Previous women rulers—like Mary I of England—had asserted their authority over all the men around them. Elizabeth accepted her own position of power as the ruling sovereign but recognized that the safety and security of her kingdom relied on the men of her realm. Her wealthy and influential courtiers remained her most valuable resource for advice, funds, and manpower. She could not afford to lose their loyalty by appearing unwomanly. She used courtly love and patronage to win "loyal service and genuine respect from a host of men not easily given to obedience" (Levine 29). Men like Sir Walter Raleigh flocked to her service and helped her bolster the defense of England. Sir Francis Drake and others, for instance, helped build the navy that defeated Phillip of Spain's Armada. Foreign princes who sought to marry Elizabeth were generally handled so well that they assisted her, knowingly or unknowingly, in her political and religious goals. When necessary, Elizabeth used French suitors to keep Spain at bay. Furthermore, Elizabeth's public image carefully declined to concede any connection to Amazon women, but, when the need arose, Elizabeth acknowledged her strength by alluding to the power granted to her by the body politic.

Shakespeare, in crafting A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, carefully avoided direct references to Elizabeth except for a complimentary description of "a vestal virgin thron'd in the west". By doing so, Shakespeare artistically draws attention away from any association between Elizabeth and his characters since he did not desire to offend his sovereign lady by inappropriately connecting her to a character that might contradict Elizabeth's public image.

Elizabeth, a knowledgeable manipulator, used the power of her position as sovereign and supreme patroness to exert an indirect influence on the theater and manipulate the image of her that dramatists utilized. Theater was a gathering place for the Elizabethan people where Elizabeth's ideas about religion, marriage, and women's roles could be presented to her subjects. With the help of the theater, Elizabeth was able to seek public support without using force. The structure of England's patronage system—with Elizabeth as supreme patroness—allowed Elizabeth to convince Shakespeare and other dramatists to tread carefully in depicting sovereign ladies.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the play reported as most offensive to Elizabeth I was Shakespeare's Richard III (Greenblatt Norton Shakespeare 38). Elizabeth reputedly found the deposition scene unbearable and slightly threatening.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two for more details on Titania's association with women of Greek myth (pg.56 and Endnote 7).

<sup>3</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh referred to Elizabeth as Cynthia in his poems. See Walter Oakeshott (146-209) or Stephen Greenblatt (Sir Walter Raleigh 57-60, 93).

<sup>4</sup> The conflict between Oberon and Titania over the changeling boy was previously explored in Chapter Two (see pages 57-59)

<sup>5</sup> See details in Chapter Four (pp.95-96 and endnote 3) and in Antonia Fraser's Lives of the Kings and Queens of England (200).

<sup>6</sup> The contrast between Shakespeare's Hippolyta and the recorded perception of Amazons has already been discussed on pages 75-77 of Chapter Three.



## Chapter Six

### Female Sovereignty: Elizabeth I and the Power of Women

Through New Historicist methods, literary critics can learn about the chief concerns of Elizabethan England. In doing so, they can examine questions involving male control of females and expectations about the role women were expected to play in society. The reign of Elizabeth Tudor, an unmarried female monarch, generated debate about what her marrying might have meant to the people of England, especially her courtiers. Would her consort gain authority over the people of England? Would he possess the power to influence Elizabeth's decisions? Would the consort, if he were a prince from another realm, take Elizabeth away from her people, and England, to live in his kingdom? Would the consort even care about the people of England as more than a means to pursue his own objectives? Because of these questions, Elizabeth's reign encouraged the authors, artists, and dramatists of England to explore concepts of women's role in society.

With Elizabeth's ascension to England's throne, evaluation of the capabilities of women in the social and political world led to support of Elizabeth's rights as an unmarried queen. Her political and social manipulations assisted Elizabeth in maintaining her own authority without threatening the men of her realm. Especially since she remained perpetually unmarried, Elizabeth's position as sovereign and England's primary patron enabled her to have a unique impact on the men around her. As queen, Elizabeth controlled the privileges and powers the sovereign could endow upon courtiers; therefore, her courtiers had to

seek Elizabeth's patronage. The pursuit of Elizabeth's favor obliged the members of the English court—and anyone else seeking political, financial, or social advancement—to pay attention to their sovereign's wishes. In her endeavor to gain public support, Elizabeth created her own public image. Any man seeking her favor, and the privileges that came with it, had to consult that image in representing Elizabeth. Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare, as well as others who sought court privileges and the queen's favor, pondered the role Elizabeth I played as an unmarried female sovereign while carefully avoiding potential offense. Elizabeth's efforts to manipulate authors, artists, and dramatists to gain support for her stance on the subjects of marriage and religion affected the period's view of women and their potential for political, economic, and social power.

From the beginning of her reign, Elizabeth was urged to marry and provide for the future of her kingdom; but, she never did accede to those urgings. The men who served in her government, at her court or in Parliament, considered the possibility of Elizabeth's marriage to be the best way to stabilize the succession. While her father, Henry VIII, had caused a great deal of commotion and resentment through his pursuit of a male heir, Elizabeth created turmoil through her reluctance to secure the future of the realm through marriage and child-bearing (Levin "Gender & Monarchy" 80). She enjoyed courtship but kept marriage negotiations from proceeding to an actual marriage.<sup>1</sup> In a speech to Parliament, quoted by Camden, Elizabeth asserted that she saw no reason to change her marital status simply because she became the queen; however, she

allowed that she would marry if it seemed to be what God wanted for her to do (Camden 26-27). Elizabeth asserted that God had placed her in her position on Earth to serve him; furthermore, she insisted that such service did not necessarily require her to marry if a marriage would distract her from her duty to God and the people placed in her charge:

Concerning Marriage, which ye so earnestly move me to, I have been long since perswaded, that I was sent into this world by God to think and doe those things chiefly which may tend to his Glory. Hereupon have I chosen that kind of life which is most free from the troublesome Cares of this world, that I might attend to the Service of God alone. (Camden 26-27)

In spite of the well-intentioned reasoning Elizabeth gave for her decision, a subtle urging to reconsider her position came to be reflected in the literature of the period. For instance, in Spenser's The Faerie Queene, Una responds to Prince Arthur's recounting of his dream about Gloriana by praising Gloriana's good luck in having found him to help defend her honor (Spenser 1.9.16). This comment, though spoken by a fictional character, hints at the fact that some people wished Elizabeth would marry. Many of the courtiers who recommended that Elizabeth marry "found the idea of an unmarried woman ruling unnatural" (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 42). According to patriarchal tradition, women were supposed to marry, produce children, and allow their husbands to handle the responsibility of decision-making in politics and economics; even a queen was not immune to this expectation. Besides the fact that patriarchal tradition urged marriage as the

natural course for a respectable woman, Elizabeth was reminded that marriage would also allow her to produce heirs for the English throne. Heirs would provide a secure future for England since the succession would be certain; on the other hand, if Elizabeth had no children of her own, questions and controversy would surround the issue of who would rule after her.

As queen, Elizabeth "accepted an office fashioned by masculine tradition" (Dusinberre 275); nevertheless, it was her position by right as Henry VIII's daughter, and that office provided her with powers that could be used against any man who sought to control or offend her. Elizabeth's role as sovereign, however, only served to underline "the ambiguity of women's position in politics" (Dusinberre 274). Although her position granted Elizabeth a unique amount of authority in her domain, Elizabethan-era expectations of women applied to Elizabeth as much as they did to other women. She was expected not only to marry but also to rely on the advice of a consort and the men at her court in making governmental decisions. Elizabeth resisted this attitude but recognized that she needed to avoid offending the men of her realm in asserting her rights as sovereign. Elizabeth knew that her power as queen made her "a preternaturally threatening woman" to an otherwise male dominated society (Bowman 522). Previously, female power was kept firmly under male control. In the case of Elizabeth, however, female power linked itself to "supreme temporal and religious authority" and the sovereign authority in England (Bowman 522). Elizabeth's efforts in manipulating her public image sought to create a depiction that would acquire the faith of the men around her and all of the people of

England since their support was vital to the continuing success of her reign and the achievement of her goals for the religious settlement. Elizabeth had to reassure her male courtiers that uses of her power to control them would happen only when circumstances required it to maintain the well being of her people. The concept of the Prince's two bodies provided Elizabeth with a reasonable means of achieving the goal of keeping the men around her at ease without relinquishing her authority. According to the tradition of the Prince's two bodies, Elizabeth possessed a female "body natural," but she gained the rights of the "body politick" upon ascending the throne. The efforts of her sister, Mary, and other Catholic queens had created a negative image of female queens as too passionate and in need of a consort's influence to help them. Elizabeth had to overcome the restrictions of that image to keep control of her domain without alienating the support she needed to achieve her goals. Specifically, Elizabeth sought to retain the power her position granted her without creating a reason for her subjects to fear further civil or religious difficulties. Self-depiction became an essential aspect of Elizabeth's political strategy in a world where image could help or harm Elizabeth's efforts to acquire and maintain support for her goals—a task that was essential to the success of her reign and focused on the men around her. The right public perception of Elizabeth possessed the power to gain and maintain the support she required to pursue her intentions for the realm. Her self-depiction, as discussed earlier in Chapter One, was designed to support not only Elizabeth's right to the throne of England but also her stance on the marriage issue and her role as an unmarried female sovereign. Her use of

certain concepts—specifically, the Prince's two bodies and courtly love—allowed Elizabeth to maintain male support for her claim to the sovereign power without opposing attitudes of male superiority.

To retain the support she gained from the men around her, Elizabeth used the concept of the Prince's two bodies and typical ideals about women. Elizabeth conceded, through her acceptance of the concept of the Prince's two bodies, that her female body was physically weaker than a man's but reminded the men around her that she still possessed the strength of the "body politick" that came with her role as sovereign. The expectations of women in power that had existed in medieval times also served Elizabeth well as she sought to persuade her subjects that she could handle the governing of the realm without a consort or religious turmoil.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth needed to prove to her subjects "that *this* powerful woman was somehow different from the ones that really presented a threat to men" (Bowman 522). Medieval society had allowed women to control their household, or court, while their husband was away (Kelly "Did Women have a Renaissance?" 27). Furthermore, the medieval idea of courtly love, which "permitted actual vassal homage to be paid to women," shaped Elizabeth's approach to her courtiers (Kelly "Did Women have a Renaissance?" 30). Essentially, in creating her public image, Elizabeth chose to use expectations about feminine behavior to her own advantage while treating herself as an exception to the tradition of male rule. Through her use of the courtly love tradition, Elizabeth retained her possession of the reigns of power while obtaining

the services and support of the men at her court without embarrassing them or having to use force.

The medieval ideology of courtly love allowed ladies to gain the service of the men around them without giving up their own position or, in the Renaissance form Elizabeth used, risking their virtuous image (Kelly "Did Women have a Renaissance?" 25-26). In utilizing the concept of courtly love, Elizabeth cultivated an image that emphasized her possession of the primary feminine virtue expected of unmarried women—chastity. She presided at court as the maiden lady her courtiers wooed in order to gain patronage and the privileges of court positions. Furthermore, Elizabeth employed the medieval concept of courtly love to help her obtain the control she needed to manipulate her courtiers. Joan Kelly points out that "ideas [like those presented in courtly literature] supported the male-dominated social order rather than [subverted] it" ("Did Women have a Renaissance?" 26). Courtly love provided a means for Elizabeth to retain her position without threatening the men around her. In the medieval tradition of courtly love, the man freely entered into the loyal service of his chosen lady. Elizabeth's use of the courtly love concept relied upon her control of patronage and her courtiers' ambitious desire for advancement. According to Thomas Cain's analysis in Praise in the Faerie Queene, two stanzas of Spenser's work express a combination of virgin and venus qualities that are "well-suited to the Virgin Queen who controlled great courtiers like Leicester and Hatton with amatory manipulations; who made marriage negotiations the successful instrument of a foreign policy designed to prevent alliance of the

Catholic powers France and Spain; and who, even more, was a Virgin Queen mystically married (in the words of a broadsheet in 1571) to 'My dear lover England' " (50-51). The code of courtly love must have appealed to Elizabeth because it helped her to keep her courtiers in line while allowing her to live her fantasy of being the fairy queen with her attendants and the men around her heeding her every whim. Elizabeth became enamored of the fanciful idea of being the virgin queen with her male courtiers all obeying her every wish, and she wanted her favorites to play a part in the illusion: "She charmed those about her into participating in the sophisticated allegorical fantasy of the Virgin Queen, continuing to live out a mystical romance on a public stage" (Fraser 207). Her status as an unmarried female allowed Elizabeth to treat the men around her as courtly lovers seeking favors from their mistress. Indeed, as England's maiden queen, Elizabeth became the focus of her courtiers' affection as well as the ultimate source of social or political power, and she used that position to great advantage in controlling her courtiers. Elizabeth encouraged her courtiers to approach her as if she were their mistress as well as their queen. Sir Walter Raleigh among others played her game. Raleigh's poetry, addressed to Elizabeth, asserted his position as her devoted servant:

Since if my plaints serve not to prove  
 The conquest of your beauty,  
 It comes not from defect of love,  
 But from excess of duty.  
 For knowing I sue to serve



A saint of such perfection,

As all desire, but none deserve

A place in her affection. (qtd. in Bradbrook Queen's Garland 29-30)

In this selection, Raleigh begged Elizabeth to believe his actions are out of duty while declaring his love for her as his royal mistress. The poetry many courtiers like Raleigh created, which was not published at the time, spoke in terms that flattered Elizabeth. Her courtiers recognized that treating her as a lady would earn them Elizabeth's favor; such treatment was what Elizabeth sought, and reflected a recognition of her power as well as her femininity. Elizabeth's incorporation of courtly love patterns into the nature of her court allowed her to use men's own expectations about women to manipulate the men around her without offending the sense of male superiority that patriarchy encouraged. By combining the idea of the Prince's two bodies and the ideology of medieval courtly love, Elizabeth was able to possess the power of the sovereign as well as present herself as a maiden queen who posed no threat to her subjects.

Elizabeth's efforts as queen did not seek to improve the plight of other women in her kingdom; rather, Elizabeth, who the humanists acknowledged as an exceptional woman, "acted more to reinforce than to challenge the attitudes and social structures that limited women's ability to act autonomously and effectively" (Bowman 520). Instead of struggling against male supremacy, Elizabeth reacted to her role in a way that resembled how Edmund Spenser depicted Britomart's handling of her position when she took over Radigund's Amazon kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Symbolically and ideologically, Elizabeth restored the

attitude of men's' superiority in politics while empowering "her own exception from that hierarchy" (Bowman 521). She used patriarchal ideas about women to subvert the restrictions upon an unmarried queen. She shrewdly recognized that she needed the resources of her male subjects to aid in maintaining the security of the kingdom and to encourage the economy. Still, as queen, she was entitled to give or revoke political positions. Elizabeth created an atmosphere at court that obliged the men around her to woo her in order to obtain their desired goals. In return, Elizabeth gained their political, financial, and military support. Through her manipulation of the English patronage system and the concept of courtly love, Elizabeth did not require force to acquire the help she needed from her male courtiers. Instead, Elizabeth used her male courtiers' own ambition to achieve her intended goals. Furthermore, though she was a woman, Elizabeth was also, as sovereign, the center of the government and the "body politick" that led England. To emphasize this fact, Elizabeth routinely referred to herself as "king" or "prince".

Because the people of the Elizabethan era argued that only divinely appointed female rulers rightly deserved to wield the sovereign power, Elizabeth encouraged an image of herself as a divinely chosen female sovereign (Bowman 520). John King observes that "Elizabeth's invocation of divine authority as an external and universal source of power supported her effort to validate royal sovereignty and to deny its limitation by male subjects" ("Queen Elizabeth I" 34). A perception of her as divinely appointed strengthened Elizabeth's authority as a female sovereign since Elizabethan-era people believed that only divinely

selected women were truly granted the power of "the body politick" (Bowman 518). The power of "the body politick," if granted to Elizabeth, gave her the ability to command the men of her realm. The fact that Elizabeth was divinely selected to achieve England's throne was supported by the Tudors' ideas of English history which were used by Edmund Spenser in creating the allegorical world of his The Faerie Queene. Spenser's work in creating The Faerie Queene represented "the first attempt on a grand scale to embody the new political-historical conception of England" (Watkins 44). The Tudor dynasty's concept of English history, which claimed that the Tudors' ancestral line was descended from the rulers of ancient Troy through Aeneas' grandson, Brutus, found its way into Spenser's praise of Elizabeth in the book read by Prince Arthur which begins by describing Brutus arriving in England and defeating the giants who were then in charge. In The First Elizabeth, Carolly Erickson describes a "huge illuminated genealogical roll, some thirty yards long, meant to be hung on the wall of a long palace gallery" (251). This family tree "depicted England's kings 'from the creation to Queen Elizabeth,' marching in relentless chronological urgency toward the present reign" and "made of the jumbled, often historically incoherent past an ordered destiny—Elizabeth's destiny" (Erickson 251). For Elizabeth, this chart of her family history justified her position on the throne of England and "served as a counterweight to the forces of disorder and criticism in the kingdom and at court" (Erickson 251). This history gave the Tudor line an ancient claim to royal blood and the right to rule in God's name by affiliating "the dominant order of England with the great orders of Rome and Troy through Geoffrey of

Monmouth's fanciful lineage" (Whigham 86). It also assisted Elizabeth by suggesting that God had destined the Tudor line for sovereignty in order to allow Elizabeth to eventually achieve the throne of England.

Mary Bowman suggests that this perception of Elizabeth as a divinely chosen exception to the rule of male sovereignty may have been encouraged because Elizabeth feared the possibility of other women gaining power that might rival her own. Bowman argues in favor of this concept as she analyzes the struggle between Edmund Spenser's characters of Britomart and Radigund as a reflection of Elizabeth's attempt to represent a different type of female power that contrasted with the form of female power associated with her immediate peer, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots:

Much of the image that Elizabeth chose to project evokes a favorable contrast with the Scottish queen. The Virgin Queen of England against the sexually scandalous Queen of Scots, the peace-bringing "naturall mother" of the country against the divisive and politically awkward mother of James VI, the nun-like virtuous bride of her kingdom against the husband murdering adulteress—all contribute to an increasingly stark contrast between the saintly image of Elizabeth and the witchlike image Mary developed in the loyal Elizabethan imagination, an image Spenser later reflects in choosing Duessa as his clearest stand-in for Mary. (Bowman 519)

The contrast between Elizabeth and Mary Stuart accomplished two of Elizabeth's goals for her public depiction. First, it supported Elizabeth's position as a

different type of female ruler. Elizabeth's virginal image made her seem to be a more virtuous ruler than Scotland's Mary. In addition, Elizabeth's assertion that her concern for her realm's well-being urged her to act cautiously in considering marriage offers contrasted favorably with Mary's association with various plots to gain power by seizing the throne of England.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, it used ideals of femininity to Elizabeth's advantage by asserting that Elizabeth abided by male expectations of women.

Knowing the difficulty of her situation, Elizabeth sought to influence her public image to create a favorable impression in the minds of her subjects. Carole Levin reflects upon the fact that Elizabeth clearly recognized how to manipulate expectations:

Elizabeth I was very skillful in how she represented herself and her authority as monarch. She was able to capitalize on the expectations of her behavior as a woman and use them to her advantage; she also at times placed herself beyond traditional gender expectations by calling herself king. ("Heart and Stomach"

1)

Elizabeth's endeavor to shape an image of herself for public consideration extended into using her control of patronage to create a desirable public presentation of herself as woman and as queen. Elizabeth's use of patronage to influence the authors, artists, and dramatists of her realm—and how they depicted her—made her "the force inspiring and creating her own praise" (Cain 17). In the following reflection on a portrait of Elizabeth, Roy Strong notes that

the artist was influenced by Elizabeth's presence on the throne: "The painter of the second approaches her awestruck as he struggled to depict someone who had become an unmarried ruler of legendary fame, a visionary figure towering above her realm of England, an image of almost cosmic power" (Gloriana 9). The artist Strong describes was clearly at once inspired by Elizabeth as his sovereign lady and intimidated by her power as the ruler of England. Strong asserts that "[a]t one and the same time Elizabeth could receive rudimentary acclaim as the bringer of peace, justice and the purity of God's word, and have the most abstruse sentiments attired in all the riches of Renaissance philosophy and learning poured forth in her praise" (Cult 115). Artists carefully balanced femininity and sovereign power in depicting Elizabeth.

Even as it influenced the imagery selected by artists in depicting the queen, Elizabeth's public image also inspired the creation of various queenly characters in Elizabethan-era literature and drama. In Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene, most of his depictions of regal female characters portray women who are chaste, wise, womanly, and unmarried. The character of Britomart, arguably Spenser's best representative of Elizabeth, was presented as capable of defending herself without male support and enjoyed the freedom of a prince.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser specified two images that depicted Elizabeth's chief qualities of wise sovereignty and chastity: Gloriana and Belphebe (Spenser 16). Several other unmarried female characters in Spenser's text helped to depict Elizabeth including Una, Mercilla, Medina, and Alma. All of these women were presented as wise and capable; none of them

needed a consort, though not one of those ladies absolutely refused to marry. William Shakespeare, through the pairings of Hippolyta with Theseus and Titania with Oberon, on the other hand, created images that suggested what Elizabeth might have faced if she took a consort. Hippolyta's marriage to Theseus represented a match of a strong and capable queen to a good man—a husband to whom she acquiesced out of love.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Titania, the fairy queen of Shakespeare's play, dealt with a consort who interfered with her decisions after she denied his request.<sup>7</sup> These images from Spenser and Shakespeare illustrate how Elizabeth used her influence to manipulate representations of her; specifically, Elizabeth's self-depiction and use of patronage effected how the authors, artists, and dramatists of the period depicted her and female sovereignty.

For Elizabeth, avoiding marriage also meant preventing religious and political difficulties. Having survived the turbulence of her Catholic sister's reign, Elizabeth knew what the Protestant people of her realm had gone through.<sup>8</sup> Knowing this recent history of England's experience with female sovereignty and the public's concern about the potential influence of a queen's consort, Elizabeth recognized why the people of England would fear a Catholic consort who might influence religious policy. She wanted to ease her subjects' fears, but she did not want to offend or threaten the Catholics of the realm either.<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth's avoidance of marriage relied upon conceiving of herself as married to her kingdom; indeed, Camden quotes her as citing her coronation ring as a symbol of her "marriage" to England (26). Her refusal to accept any but a spiritual marriage

to her kingdom prevented any fear of outside interference in the affairs of England. Additionally, Elizabeth used her female body as a diplomatic tool: "smiling at the Spanish ambassador and his proposal of a suitor when France threatened, reversing the practice when Spanish intentions grew ominous" (Buckman 128). It was, politically and religiously, a shrewd move. Although Elizabeth knew that a marriage treaty would technically preserve her authority, she had also seen what happened to her sister, Mary I, under similar circumstances and realized that there was no guarantee that a consort would adhere to the agreement indicated in the treaty (King "Queen Elizabeth I" 37).<sup>10</sup> By remaining unmarried, Elizabeth maintained control of her kingdom and its future while also avoiding acceptance of a husband who might have attempted to influence her political and religious opinions. She continued to be the center of her government without an equal to challenge or influence her decisions.

Although Parliament insisted that nothing could be more harmful to the safety of England than for Elizabeth to remain unmarried and, thereby, refuse to secure the future of the realm, Elizabeth chose to maintain her maidenly image. The perpetual virginity of her image demonstrated her devotion to her role as sovereign and guardian of her people while also playing upon men's conception of women. In fact, being a woman helped Elizabeth's reputation since "[m]ale courtiers in the sixteenth century and male historians in the twentieth century have made allowances for her [character], as a woman, which they would not have made for a man": hesitation, indecision, petulance, emotionalism, and petty-mindedness (Ridley 335).<sup>11</sup> John King, like other critics, suggests that



Elizabeth's decision to depict herself as a maiden queen played a role in maintaining the power of her position. He asserts that "[i]t is undeniable that Elizabeth's retention of virginity constituted 'a political act' " (King "Queen Elizabeth I" 30). Indeed, Elizabeth used her maiden queen persona, and the virtues associated with it, to showcase her capacity to rule in spite of the difficulties that had plagued her early life.<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth achieved the throne in spite of "illegitimization, subordination of female to male in the order of primogeniture, patriarchy, and masculine supremacy" (King "Queen Elizabeth I" 30). Through the skillful manipulation of courtly love patterns, Elizabeth enjoyed the company and support of powerful and capable men without acquiescing to the authority of a husband. Furthermore, through skillful manipulation of concepts about women's roles and the use of medieval courtly love patterns and the idea of the Prince's two bodies, Elizabeth I maintained her position as a female sovereign without offending her male courtiers. As Elizabeth endeavored to address their concerns about female rule, the men around her grew to trust Elizabeth's reign and her ability to comfortably play her role as an unmarried female sovereign. Elizabeth's self-depiction acquiesced to patriarchal concepts about female roles, but managed to maintain the privileges of her sovereign power.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth enjoyed courtship and handled her suitors with a deft hand, but she realized that marriage could rob her of her position—both in the relationship and in her government (Levin 41). See discussions in Chapter One (pp. 28-30) and Chapter Three (pp. 72-73 and 77-80).

<sup>2</sup> In medieval times, the feudal system, which connected power to control of land, “permitted both inheritance and administration of feudal property by women” (Kelly “Did Women have a Renaissance?” 27). Joan Kelly describes Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter, Marie of Champagne, as examples of medieval queens who wielded influence over the men around them (Kelly “Did women have a Renaissance? 29-30). Women like Eleanor and Marie could asserts their influence “only because they had actual power to exert” (Kelly “Did Women have a Renaissance? 30). Like them, Elizabeth I of England worked to secure her power before making full use of it.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Three (pp. 82-84) for details about Britomart’s actions in taking over Radigund’s kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> See endnote 4 in Chapter 4 for details about where you can locate details of the plots that Mary Stuart was involved in.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter Three gives extensive details about the connection between Elizabeth and Britomart (pp. 69-75 and 77-83). Britomart and Elizabeth are both female heirs to the throne of their domain who demonstrate how a female can capably wield sovereign authority with or without a consort.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Three (pp. 76-77) and Chapter Five (pp. 117-118).

<sup>7</sup> Chapter Two (pp. 57-60) and Chapter Five (pp. 117-119) provide insight into this aspect of the relationship between Oberon and Titania.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion in Chapters Four (pp. 96-99) and Five (pg. 113).

<sup>9</sup> The text of this analysis has reflected on this concern at various points. See the earlier discussions of Elizabeth's Self-Depiction (Chapter One, pp. 35-42) and about Britomart's opposition to Radigund as reflective of Elizabeth's contrast to Mary Stuart (Chapter Three, pp. 77-80).

<sup>10</sup> As was mentioned in previous chapters, Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain soured after he was denied any authority in England (Fraser 200 and Luke 375). In spite of the marriage treaty that preserved Mary's control of England, Philip sought to possess and wield influence in his wife's domain. The people of England, however, would not allow him that opportunity. Philip's displeasure about this fact hurt Mary who turned against the Protestants of the realm. Her attack on Protestantism was rooted in Mary's belief that her unhappy marriage was God's punishment for the heresy of Protestantism, which continued in her realm. Their marriage, and its results—Philip's abandonment of Mary and the executions of Protestants that followed, created a precedent "which demonstrated that even though a treaty and parliamentary act might preserve a married queen's political authority, they had no necessary effect on her husband's actions" (King "Queen Elizabeth I" 37). Memories of how Philip had influenced Mary Tudor's actions caused Elizabeth to be wary of forcing her subjects to accept an unpopular consort. Her caution also eased fears about the influence a consort might have upon her actions.

<sup>11</sup> These qualities also differentiated Elizabeth from other female queens of the era who were less well received by their people. Elizabeth's sister, Mary Tudor, did not have the same faults. Jasper Ridley states that "[n]ot every woman has these characteristics, nor had every sixteenth century queen; there was no trace of them in Mary Tudor, Catherine de Medici or Mary of Hungary" (335). These qualities were faults that were deemed feminine and made Elizabeth seem a lot less threatening to the men around her.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth had seen the consequences of opposing her father's will. That observation taught her the value of caution—a lesson that served her well politically. See pages 25-26 of Chapter One for more about this insight.

## Conclusion

### A Final Glance at Elizabeth's Influence on her World

In Elizabethan England, the presence of Queen Elizabeth I on the throne produced an atmosphere that encouraged the development of creative works by promoting and supporting art, literature, and drama. Indeed, as Jasper Ridley notes, music and drama were revived during Elizabeth's reign:

...when the musical works of Morley, Byrd, Dowland, and Weelkes were widely sold, when the dramas of Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Dekker, Middleton, and Webster were preformed, and of the first plays of Shakespeare, who could never have written them if he had been born, not in the sixth year of Elizabeth's reign, but fifty years earlier, before the drama had been freed from the straightjacket of the medieval morality plays in which it had been confined before the Reformation. (318)

The livelihood of the people who wrote, created art, or performed in plays depended largely on the approval and financial support of the wealthy and powerful. Elizabeth's courtiers became patrons as they commissioned portraits, literary works, and performances by acting troupes. As the center of wealth and power in England, Elizabeth was the chief patron of her kingdom's authors, artists, and playwrights. Most importantly, Elizabeth's role in the patronage system influenced representations of women and female power because it obliged the men at the English court to recognize that Elizabeth's position as sovereign granted her control over the privileges and political power they

possessed. Elizabeth's manipulation of her role in the patronage system allowed her to indirectly inspire many of the representations of her that appeared in the literature of the time. Examining the image Elizabeth created for herself and persuaded others to promote demonstrates the influence of questions about women's role in society. The works of literature, art, and drama produced during her reign possess echoes of that imagery.

In The First Elizabeth, Carolly Erickson writes that Elizabeth I "had become the stuff of legend" in the last years of her reign (382). Elizabeth endured intense speculation and scandal during her forty-year reign, but her fame transcended itself in the last decade of her life (Erickson 382). She had successfully handled threats to the safety of her kingdom, achieved a tolerant attitude toward religion, and controlled her court while maintaining a womanly image that her male subjects would not be threatened by. Elizabeth developed a public image that made her a popular sovereign in the opinion of her subjects; indeed, Roy Strong asserts that "in a span of forty years an individual ha[d] been transposed into a symbol" (Gloriana 9). Elizabeth's public image was intended to enable her to unite her realm by making her a symbol around which the people of England could rally. She felt that her mission as sovereign was to bridge the religious differences between the people of England, which had developed during the previous reigns of her father, brother, and sister. Because of her position as sovereign, Elizabeth became a rallying point for her subjects; however, she still needed to overcome their doubts about the right of a woman to govern without a husband to help her.

Overcoming her subjects' doubts about her ability would have assisted Elizabeth in gaining the public support she required to pursue her goals. As Levine notes, "Elizabeth understood at once the importance of popular support" (57). Elizabeth's image and public persona were carefully calculated to gain the public's support for her reign. Elizabeth designed her self-depiction to utilize the Protestant iconography associated with her father and brother while adhering to the most important patriarchal expectation of unmarried women, the virtue of chastity. The idea that Elizabeth was both a woman and sovereign—an assertion rooted in the concept of the Prince's two bodies—suited Elizabeth's need to acquire support, from the court and from the population of England, for her main goal—an end to the religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics. The image Elizabeth needed to project to the men around her at court had to balance her femininity with her power as sovereign. Furthermore, she had to address the issue of religion in a way that would help calm the fears of Catholics without alienating the Protestants who had perceived her as their hope for the future during the religious purges Mary I had initiated. Elizabeth needed to gain the loyalty of her subjects in order to achieve her goal of a resolution of England's religious tensions; therefore, establishing an image that would appeal to her subjects proved an important concern for Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's approach to England's religious situation helped her win the support of most of her subjects. The aftermath of the religious struggles of the Protestant reformation had left the majority of the English population worried about the dangers of professing outlawed religious beliefs. Memories of the late

Mary I and her merciless persecution of Protestants provided the foundation for that fear (Fraser 200). During Mary's reign, Protestants had focused their hopes for the future upon the belief that Elizabeth would eventually achieve the throne; however, when she did reach the throne, Elizabeth shrewdly avoided clearly favoring the Protestant religion in order to avoid alienating her Catholic subjects. Through her early handling of the issue of religion, Elizabeth demonstrated her understanding of the caution needed in politics—especially international politics: “By keeping her ambassador in Rome, keeping the mass (with minor alterations) in her chapel and delaying the religious reform in Parliament she forestalled papal excommunication” (Erickson 185). Her exploitation of the iconography of the book, representing the Bible, encouraged a perception of Elizabeth as a faithful student of the Bible. The authors and artists of Elizabethan England helped to advocate the image of Elizabeth as a faithful student of the Bible when they depicted her “as the Protestant heroine and savior of England who reads or carries a Bible or evangelical book” (King Tudor Iconography 104).<sup>1</sup> This image made the queen a model of a faithful believer using the Bible as her religious authority. Such an image of their queen intrinsically told Elizabeth's subjects that they, too, should study the Bible and seek their own route to God's kingdom. Elizabeth sought peace in her kingdom and hoped that bible study would help her subjects to recognize how to live together peacefully in spite of religious differences. Elizabeth sought to champion the concept that discovery of God's law and achievement of a place in heaven could occur through carefully reading



and understanding the Bible. Study of the Bible would allow an individual to judge for himself or herself what God's truth was.

Edmund Spenser's imagery depicted the usefulness of bible study. In The Faerie Queene, the Redcrosse Knight begins to discover his own pathway to proper observance of God's law—and salvation—with the help of Fidelia's teachings. Edmund Spenser's depiction of Fidelia's teaching of the Redcrosse Knight, during which she uses a book that represents the Bible, endorsed the idea of understanding God's law through bible study. Elizabeth's approach to the question of religion, as demonstrated by Fidelia and the Redcrosse Knight in Spenser's text, sanctioned respect for personal opinions based in the Bible's text by encouraging the use of vernacular Bibles and the Protestant belief in the concept of justification by faith alone. By situating most religious authority within the Bible, Elizabeth helped create an atmosphere in which tolerance could develop. If the people of England accepted bible study and faith as justification for religious opinions, Protestants and Catholics would no longer need to fear expressing their religious beliefs since the Bible, not the government, retained the final say on religious issues. Seeking her subjects' loyalty required that Elizabeth prevent any fear of religious persecution; thus, she chose a moderate course in matters of religion.<sup>2</sup>

Elizabeth's handling of foreign suitors also played a part in keeping her kingdom as peaceful as she possibly could. Elizabeth carefully manipulated foreign suitors to avoid offending them and used courtship to prevent foreign princes from interfering in England's affairs. She used France and Spain against

each other according to the needs of political circumstances (Buckman 128).<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth allowed foreign dignitaries to court her but carefully avoided permitting any courtship to go too far. For Elizabeth, accepting any suitor, whether Protestant or Catholic, would not only be admitting to desire but would create a threat to England's safety. Even a Protestant consort would pose a threat to peace in Elizabeth's kingdom since such a consort might have his own agenda. More importantly, choosing a foreign prince as consort would mean allying England with another country. A foreign influence that might force England into affairs that would endanger the safety of the kingdom's people and its privileges as a sovereign nation remained something Elizabeth did not want anymore than did her people.

The fact that she was an unmarried woman caused Elizabeth a great deal of difficulty at first.<sup>4</sup> The chief concern that haunted Elizabeth throughout her reign was the fact that she refused to settle the issue of who would succeed to England's throne if Elizabeth indeed died without children of her own. Though she never married, Elizabeth recognized the need to secure the future of the realm; however, she wanted to avoid a situation that would place her own power at risk. As sovereign, Elizabeth had the right to shape the future of England, and she maintained that privilege by refusing to marry any suitor who would not benefit England's political, religious, or economic future. To keep that liberty, Elizabeth had to struggle against patriarchal doubts and the restraints created by expectations of women.

Elizabeth had to deal with the fact that her presence on the throne granted

her a position that contradicted the era's patriarchal attitude that women should be submissive and obedient to their husbands. Indeed, Elizabeth's decision to rule alone created the anomaly of an unmarried female sovereign: "Within her culture's terms, the queen might be viewed as a female aberration akin to a belligerent Venus, having forsaken her female sexuality to become a goddess of empire and of love thoroughly sublimated and heroicized" (Henderson 147).

Elizabeth refrained from marriage although other recent female rulers—including her own sister, Mary I, and her primary female peer, Mary, Queen of Scots—had been married queens. Elizabeth, however, had seen the problems her sister's marriage created and vowed that she would not subject the people of England to another unpopular consort or a reason to fear further religious turmoil (Levin "Heart and Stomach" 8). She told Parliament that if she married anyone, her consort would have to be someone who cared as much about the people of England as she did (Camden 27). Although her refusal to marry could have been seen as seeking personal power without regard for her people's future, Elizabeth explained it as reflecting her concern for her people's well-being following a period of religious upheavals that had left their physical and spiritual safety in doubt.

Carolly Erickson, in The First Elizabeth, observes that the people of England saw Elizabeth "their unique ruler from two opposing viewpoints throughout her long reign: on the one hand, they viewed her ill-reputed personal life with extreme distaste, on the other hand, they cheered her as their luck-bringing champion, as brave as she was, for a woman, unconventional" (275).

Her subjects slowly came to appreciate Elizabeth as sovereign, though—as a woman—she continued to be unusual because of her position. To the men around her at court and throughout her domain, Elizabeth projected an image that allowed them to see her as feminine without forgetting that she was queen. Because of her status as an unmarried woman and sovereign, Elizabeth was able to manipulate the male members of her court through the medieval concept of courtly love. By holding the attentions of her male courtiers, Elizabeth obligated them to help her militarily, financially, or politically. As Diana E. Henderson notes, Elizabeth was “a female monarch who manipulated erotic language for political ends” (17). Like a Shakespearean maiden, as described by Stephen Greenblatt, Elizabeth enjoyed her position as ruler of her domain: “[t]he maid, however, is strong-willed and refuses perversely to submit to the erotic dance that would lead to the legitimate male appropriation of her person and her [property]... Indeed, she appears to enjoy ruling her household” (Shakespearean Negotiations 69). Male support for her objectives assisted Elizabeth’s reign by providing patriarchal sanction of her actions.

Literature, art, and drama also provided Elizabeth with a means of presenting her carefully designed public image to the general population. The works of authors, artists, and dramatists served as a conduit to the people Elizabeth needed to reach with her self-depiction. Elizabeth did not influence the authors or artists around her directly; however, her position within the patronage system, as supreme patroness of the kingdom, did lead to an indirect influence. In this sense, Thomas H. Cain’s statement that Elizabeth was the source of her

own praise is instructive about the reality of Elizabethan court life and the English patronage system (17). This fact becomes most clear in Roy Strong's description of the portrait pattern process that allowed Elizabeth to authorize an approved form for her artistic representation and create a timelessly youthful image that parliament eventually endorsed (Gloriana 20). In her effort to manipulate those seeking her favor, Elizabeth created an atmosphere that encouraged creativity while maintaining control of her own image.

The art, literature, and drama produced during the Elizabethan era acknowledged the fact that Elizabeth controlled opportunities for prestige and power in England. The patronage system encouraged the men seeking power, fortune, or honor at the English court to seek the queen's favor. As sovereign, Elizabeth claimed the role of social and political center of her domain. All potential for advancement in English society during Elizabeth's reign originated with Elizabeth. In Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory, Frank Whigham describes the way Elizabeth served as "the original source of privilege" (12). In the role of queen of England, Elizabeth became the metaphorical fountain of civilized English society from which all good and virtuous action sprang. As such, Elizabeth had the ability to grant or revoke the powers that her courtiers possessed and made full use of that privilege in her effort to control her court. Recognizing this fact, male courtiers who sought greater power took advantage of Elizabeth's encouragement of courtly love patterns. Elizabeth's courtiers quickly discovered the consequences of courting the queen as Elizabeth's use of courtly love patterns from the medieval era

forced her male courtiers to approach her as their mistress in seeking her favor. The homage called for in courtly love "signified male service, not domination or subordination of the lady" (Kelly "Did Women have a Renaissance?" 23). Therefore, Elizabeth could acquire the services of her courtiers without having any man force her to do as he wished. Similarly, by courting Elizabeth in a manner that flattered her, her male courtiers wooed her in hopes of increasing their own stature in the government and society.

Elizabeth's courtiers, including the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh, created writings for her to enjoy. In The Queen's Garland: Verses made by Her Subjects For Elizabeth I, Queen of England now collected In Honour of her majesty Queen Elizabeth II, M.C. Bradbrook compiles a collection of verses made by Elizabethan-era male court members in honor of Elizabeth I. Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, wrote poetry for Elizabeth that declared their loyalty and admiration. Since the male courtiers who wrote for Elizabeth hoped to increase their standing at court by gaining her favor, they were careful to use images that flattered her. Thus, patronage helped Elizabeth retain control of the men around her by emphasizing her position as the ultimate source of power and privilege. This system of patronage and favorites allowed Elizabeth to compensate those who earned her favor without giving up her virginal image. Authors, artists, dramatists and courtiers who pleased her were rewarded for their efforts as much as possible through financial compensation and positions at court. Those who displeased Elizabeth, like John Stubbs, found themselves the subjects of severe punishment.<sup>5</sup>

Like Elizabeth's courtiers, authors and artists knew they had to approach representation of Elizabeth carefully. Most authors and artists looked to the court and the aristocratic population for financial support of their efforts. Since Elizabeth controlled the positions and privileges of the wealthy and had the power to swiftly punish anyone whose work she deemed slanderous or traitorous, authors and artists could not intentionally offend Elizabeth without risking their lives or their livelihoods.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Four, in The Faerie Queene, Edmund Spenser used the characters he associated with Elizabeth to praise her by depicting her wise sovereignty, chaste virginity, and pious respect for the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, he could not ignore the potential problems inherent in the court system—a fact that is demonstrated by the characters of Duessa, Philotime, and Lucifera. Through these three characters, Spenser is, intentionally or unintentionally, mirroring the darker side of the court system and warning Elizabeth about it.

Like Spenser, William Shakespeare wrote under the constraints of the patronage system and sought to avoid Elizabeth's associating herself with characters whose depictions might have offended her.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned in Chapters Three and Five, he created a positive image of Amazons—mythic women who opposed the restraint of male domination, and with whom Elizabeth was often unwillingly associated—in his version of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, who acquiesces to the will of her beloved future husband, Theseus. On the other hand, Shakespeare's fairy queen, Titania, had to be carefully disassociated from

Elizabeth since her passionate temperament and opposition to the patriarchal control of her husband, Oberon, could have offended Elizabeth and the men at court who still clung to a sense of male superiority in governance.

Analyzing literature demonstrates the veracity of assertions that works of literature, art, and drama ponder concerns of the historical era in which the works were created. Daryl Gless points out that “[o]vertly or obliquely, hypothetical reconstructions of the author’s political, religious, or literary allegiances provide the ground on which interpretive authority ultimately rests” (2). Readers can begin to make sense of a text, and support their interpretations, by learning about the author’s background and the influential ideas of his or her time period. Furthermore, by doing so, modern ideas—like feminism—that were not considered at the time can become a focal point of a new critique of the work.

In examining Elizabethan literature, particularly these two works, critics can ponder the feminist issues of the era, which questioned the right of female rulers to possess total sovereign authority, using New Historicist techniques. The English literature created during the reign of Elizabeth I reflects an interest in the issues of female sovereignty and the role of women, at home and in society, as well as the manner in which Elizabeth utilized her position to influence the public image created for her. Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare, along with other authors, crafted depictions of women that explored the possibilities and fears that Elizabeth’s status as an unmarried female monarch created, and how views of women and their role in society were affected by the successful reign of an unmarried woman.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John King's Tudor Royal Iconography gives confirmation of this imagery through its inclusion of samples from the period.

<sup>2</sup> Kathy Lynn Emerson observes that "[t]o be Catholic in Elizabethan England was illegal, but whether it was also treasonous depended on the individual" (98).

Fines were given for not participating in the Church of England, but Catholics actually were not severely persecuted during Elizabeth's early reign. Besides the fine required for not adhering to required attendance at the Church of England, being caught giving or hearing the Catholic mass also resulted in a fine. Later, though being Catholic was not in itself treasonous, individuals who attempted to turn English subjects from the Church of England—and anyone so persuaded—were called traitors and deemed guilty of high treason (Emerson 98). Russ McDonald provides further discussion of restrictions on Catholics under Elizabeth I in The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare (310).

<sup>3</sup> This fact is also discussed, in more detail, in Chapter One (pp. 28-30) and Chapter Six (pp. 141-142).

<sup>4</sup> See the Introduction's discussion of the work of Staub, Hobby, and Woolf for a more detailed analysis of patriarchal expectations as they relate to Elizabeth (pp. 2-4). Also refer to Chapter One (pp. 28-33) and Chapter Six (pp. 127-131).

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned previously, Stubbs had his right hand cut off after "The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be Swallowed by an other French Marriage," a text in which he spoke negatively of Elizabeth's plans to marry the Duke of Alencon, offended Elizabeth. See the discussion of this

incident in Chapter One (pp. 33-34) and read Ilona Bell's essay in Dissing Elizabeth (99-117).

<sup>6</sup> Details about this aspect of Spenser's work appear in Chapter Two (pp. 45-55), Chapter Three (pp. 69-75 and pp. 79-83), Chapter Four (pp. 90-101), and Chapter Six (pp. 138-139).

<sup>7</sup> This fact about Shakespeare's work is discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 56-61), Chapter Three (pp. 75-78), and Chapter Five (pp. 116-125).

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